

Till We Have Faces:

C. S. Lewis's Textual Metamorphosis

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

C. S. Lewis's novel, *Till We Have Faces*, has been misunderstood by both scholars and readers alike. This paper seeks to read the text through the lens of Lewis's own literary criticism. It begins by presenting Lewis's fundamental dilemma of the mind, the rift between the rational and the imaginative faculties. Lewis posits myth as a "partial solution" to this problem. This paper traces Lewis's ideas from his early position on myth as "beautiful lies" to the more nuanced, later position where myth is connected with terms like "truth," "reality," "fact" and "history." Using the text of "On Stories," and the chapter "On Myth" from Lewis's book *An Experiment in Criticism*, this paper argues that Lewis, because of the basic elusiveness of mythic experience, steps into the use of story or narrative as a provisional solution for the dilemma of the mind. This is then applied to *Till We Have Faces*, arguing that the story is not a myth or an allegory, but a realistic novel with a hidden mythic reality, a Lewisian narrative that fulfills his requirements of *Story*. A close reading of *Till We Have Faces* connects the text with Lewis's realism of content and realism of presentation. This reading then places the text within the problem of rationality set against imaginative reception. *Till We Have Faces* is a test case for Lewis's extensive ideas about Divine Myth, its hiddenness behind and within narrative, and its power to heal a divided mind. The narrative of *Till We Have Faces*, for the main character Orual, as well as for the receptive reader, comes to embody the transformative power of extra-literary myth within the containment of word-dense, tensed story.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Matthew Zehr. His patience and encouragement has made the work worthwhile.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AL</i>	<i>The Allegory of Love</i>
<i>AMR</i>	<i>All My Road Before Me</i>
<i>CL I, II, III</i>	<i>Collected Letters, Vol. I, II, and III</i>
<i>DT</i>	<i>The Dark Tower and other stories</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church</i>
<i>EIC</i>	<i>An Experiment in Criticism</i>
<i>EL</i>	<i>English Literature in the Sixteenth Century</i>
<i>FL</i>	<i>The Four Loves</i>
<i>GD</i>	<i>The Great Divorce</i>
<i>GID</i>	<i>God in the Dock</i>
<i>GMD</i>	<i>George MacDonald: An Anthology</i>
<i>GO</i>	<i>A Grief Observed</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>Prayer: Letters to Malcolm</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Miracles</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Mere Christianity</i>
<i>OTOW</i>	<i>Of This and Other Worlds</i>
<i>Pere</i>	<i>Perelandra</i>
<i>Poems</i>	<i>Poems</i>
<i>PPL</i>	<i>A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>The Pilgrim's Regress</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Rehabilitations and Other Essays</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>Reflections on the Psalms</i>
<i>SBJ</i>	<i>Surprised by Joy</i>
<i>SIB</i>	<i>Spirits in Bondage</i>
<i>SLE</i>	<i>Selected Literary Essays</i>
<i>SMR</i>	<i>Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature</i>
<i>TLB</i>	<i>The Last Battle</i>
<i>TST</i>	<i>They Stand Together</i>
<i>TWHF</i>	<i>Till We Have Faces</i>
<i>VDT</i>	<i>The Voyage of the Dawn Treader</i>
<i>WG</i>	<i>The Weight of Glory and other Addresses</i>

Introduction

Dabney Adams Hart has correctly identified myth as the key component of C.S. Lewis's works, noting, "Lewis's idea about the function of myth in the human imagination was the heart and core of all his writing in every form" (*Through* 8-9). Myth is, one might say, the "master key" to Lewis's ideas, just as myth itself, according to Lewis, is the "master key" hidden within a story that can be used on any door in a reader's imaginative realm that he might wish (*OTOW* 115). Defining *myth*, however, has proven to be both divisive and elusive, eliciting a whole range of reactions, from the negative dismissal of myth as a fabricated (and thus meaningless) structure of primitive religion to the search for the mythopoeic and the creation of modern-day mythologies in an attempt to escape an abstracted world.¹ The prevailing equation within most of these definitions, and among the first reactions to the word *myth* itself, posits myth as the equivalent to falsehood, unreality, and baseless assertion. Many dictionaries, including the OED, list a bipartite definition, labeling myth either as a "traditional story" (usually with supernatural components) that explains or justifies the beliefs, history, or rituals within a particular society or as an "erroneous story," a fiction that results in a "misrepresentation of the truth" ("myth" 1a, 2a).

The mid-twentieth century bulge in myth-criticism within literary theory is positioned around thinkers like Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and Northrop Frye² following the earlier

¹ The recent surge of mythopoeic entertainment in pop culture is an example of the mass-market appeal of alternate worlds that contain their own mythological underpinnings. Examples include the Harry Potter books and movies, the re-workings of fairy tales like *Snow White*, and the recent surge in vampire-themed novels and movies.

² Hart, in her work titled *Through The Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis*, considers Lewis to be "avant-garde as a critic" who positions myth as primary in literature before Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade and Northrop Frye's work on myth (12). Michael Ward, in *Planet Narnia* also mentions these three scholars in conjunction with Lewis's view that "there are certain foundational archetypes that recur in cultures the world over and throughout history" (230).

anthropological interest in mythology within the scope of primitive societies (that is, by Frazer).³ Not only does Lewis precede and anticipate this preoccupation with myth within the scope of literary studies, but also he is well aware of the prior anthropological focus.⁴ Lewis's own definition of myth, however, is the result of a man following an idea that haunts him for his entire life. As such, it is not easily reducible to a single definition, and is complicated by subtle changes throughout his lifetime. For instance, the early, and oft-quoted line of Lewis's defines myth entirely along the popular falsehood strata, where myths are only "lies breathed through silver"—beautiful, but limited in the fact-bound harshness of daily life (Carpenter 147).⁵ This must be balanced with another commonly quoted line from a later, fictional work, where Lewis describes mythology as "gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility" (*Pere* 201).⁶ Then mythology, a mix of "gleams" among the earthly soil, comes to focus when Christ, the eternal Myth, enters history and becomes "fact" in the Incarnation (*GID* 66).⁷ Lewis increasingly seems to associate myth more with terms like "reality," "truth," and "fact" rather than with the early equation of myth as beautiful lies.⁸

Lewis's ideas about myth show up in all the forms of writing he undertook: private correspondence, public lectures, literary reviews, literary essays, poetry, fictional works,

³ In Lewis's essay "Religion without Dogma," he mentions various views of mythology. Among these, he lists Frazer as an example of mythology "as imitative agricultural ritual mistaken for propositions (in the days of Frazer)" (*GID* 131). This passage will be discussed further in chapter two.

⁴ See Marjorie Wright's introduction to her dissertation, *The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth: A Study in the Myth-Philosophy of Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien*, as well as Dabney Adams Hart's book *Through the Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis*. Hart notes that Lewis may precede these thinkers in regards to myth, but "the increasing interest in the nature and function of myth cannot be attributed to Lewis" (145). Though Lewis's work was overshadowed by that of Frye and Campbell, Hart argues for the importance of Lewis's place in literary theory.

⁵ Lewis is reported to have said this phrase in a conversation with J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson on the night of 19 September 1931 (Carpenter 147); Walter Hooper also mentions this conversation and its long-reaching effects in his preface to the collection of essays titled *Of This and Other Worlds* (14-15).

⁶ This is part of Ransom's musings on mythology in *Perelandra*, written in 1943.

⁷ This comes from Lewis's essay "Myth Became Fact," published originally in *World Dominion*, vol XXII (Sept-Oct 1944), p 267-70.

⁸ These terms will be distinguished in a later portion of this paper, but for the purposes here, they must be emphasized simply as being important to Lewis's ideas about mythology.

Christian apologetics, and autobiographical materials. From the start, myth resided in the category of imagination for Lewis, “a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth” within his mind that stood in sharp contrast to rationalistic critical thinking that he employed in his work (*SBJ* 138). He began noting this division: myth on one side, propositional statements on the other; imagination standing against reason; enjoyment of experience opposed to the contemplation of that enjoyment. Myth seemed to recede constantly out of view, an elusive taste that seemed drained of meaning once codified in words. This became, for Lewis, a major dilemma—the gap between the sign and the signified seemed impossible to breach.

C. S. Lewis’s fictional work, *Till We Have Faces*, is situated at the end of a career devoted to myth. The subtitle of the work places it immediately in this context: “A Myth Retold.” On the surface, it would seem straightforward. Lewis, like many others, has attempted a retelling of the Cupid and Psyche story taken from Apuleius’s work titled the *Metamorphoses*, or *The Golden Ass*. Yet Lewis’s book has been difficult to classify, garnering labels like the obvious one, “myth,” but also “allegory,” “fairy tale,” “romance,” “historical fiction,” and “modernistic novel”.⁹ The most persistent, of course, is that Lewis is simply retelling the original myth in a new form but still in a mythic framework. *Till We Have Faces*, then, is often classified as “A Myth Retold as Myth.”

In light of Lewis’s own position on myth, this is not enough, and clearly there is sufficient disagreement to warrant another look. On the continuum of genre terms, “allegory,” “fairy tale,” and “romance” could arguably be close to the term “myth,” but “historical fiction” and “modernistic novel” are much more difficult, if not impossible to reconcile with myth. A

⁹ This listing of classifications for *TWHF* will be probed in more detail in a later chapter. Early reviews mistakenly called the text “allegory,” but Lewis specifically took issue with that, insisting in a letter, “it isn’t an allegory” (*CL III* 1090). Favour for the text as a “modern novel” or some kind of “historical fiction” is popular in more recent criticism. See Chapter four of this paper for specifics.

new term needs to be introduced at this point. Using Lewis's own terms, specifically tied with his essay "On Stories,"¹⁰ and the chapter "On Myth" in *An Experiment in Criticism*, the word *Story* is a solution. Since myth, for Lewis, was an 'unwordable' transcendental reality, one could not write a pure myth. A container is needed to hold and convey myth to the reader. Lewis labels the container as "narrative" or "story." The grand story, for Lewis, is a vessel for what he considers the one true myth—the incarnation, dying, and resurrection of a god. Story, then, is the human narrative; myth is the divine reality hovering behind (and yet not separate from) the text.

Till We Have Faces contains the Cupid and Psyche myth, as it would normally function as part of a sacred ritual, put into the mouth of the priest in Essur, in Part II of the book. Yet to the main character, Orual, the myth is a corrupted, overly simplified version of her history: a slap in the face by the gods (*TWHF* 214). Orual, and the reader glancing over her shoulder, are gradually led to the real myth, the great region hidden beyond and yet within the story itself. Lewis is not retelling the Cupid and Psyche myth as myth, but as *Story*. In the book, Orual tells her story, and then retells it—this brooding on her own history, however deceptive her memory may be, begins to shape and change her perception. In the retelling, the truth gradually gathers to a focus, solidifying the myth into human story and finding a form that the reader can inhabit more directly.

First, however, we need to review the dilemma, the essential problem we have as we attempt to confront and catch the experience of the imagination in words. Lewis's division between the reason and the imagination will be the substance of chapter one. The second part of this chapter will posit myth as a partial solution (the position Lewis comes to in the essay "Myth Became Fact")—a potential bridge for the brokenness of our souls.

¹⁰ Found in the essay collection titled *Of This and Other Worlds*.

Chapter two will go deeper into Lewis's position on myth, following the path through pagan mythology, and then to the turn provided through the Incarnation. Chapter three will move into Lewis's concept of *Story*, defining the term and noting the characteristics that he mentions. Myth, though a "partial solution" to jump the gap in the mind and person, is ultimately inadequate for humans stuck in a time-bound world. Glimpses into mythical reality give meaning, but we cannot reside in myth or bring it down to practical, earthy environs. *Story*, then, is Lewis's provisional solution, a way to bring myth down into human history in a livable reality. The fourth chapter applies Lewis's position on myth and story to *Till We Have Faces*, placing the text within Lewis's categories of "realism of presentation" and "realism of content" found in *An Experiment in Criticism*. The final chapter continues the exposition of *Till We Have Faces*, moving more specifically into the life of Orual and the transformation she finds through her participation in story. Orual's linear, intentional narrative presentation, filled with realistic detail creates an atmosphere that succeeds within Lewis's own definition of *Story*. The book functions as a comment on, and application of, narrative that transforms. Orual lives the dilemma of a divided life, standing uncertain between imagination and reason, and choosing a rational legal complaint over the longing for the divine and a glimpse of myth through imagination. Stephen Crites's article, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" is important here, as well as both Gilbert Meilaender and Mara Donaldson's considerations of story.¹¹ All three provide portions of the foundation that we need for Lewis's use of story and narrative as a vessel for myth in *Till We Have Faces*.

¹¹ Gilbert Meilaender's article "C. S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience," and Mara Donaldson's "Orual's Story and the Art of Retelling: A Study of *Till We Have Faces*" are both found in the book *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis* (Columbia, London: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

Chapter 1: The Dilemma of a Divided Life

Reason and Imagination

C. S. Lewis calls the separation of the imagination and the reason a “dilemma” that plagues the mind (*GID* 66). In his poem titled “Reason,” Lewis recruits Athene and Demeter to illustrate the problem (*Poems* 81). Athene represents reason: she stands “on the soul’s acropolis,” “clear” and high (l. 1, 5). Mother Demeter, however, is “Warm, dark, obscure and infinite,” teeming with fertility; she is the imagination, deep and slumbering beneath the surface (l. 6, 9). The problem, though, is that the poet cannot make the “touch” of imagination “report the same” as reason’s “sight” and asks that another “make in me a concord” (l. 14, 12). Only then might belief be possible (l. 16).

There is a marked difference in the character and actions of the mind’s resident faculties—Athene and Demeter. The intellect values knowing, and the ability to frame that knowledge into words. Its language is primarily “scientific,” an artificial, learned skill of speaking which translates to “theological” language when it ventures into the realm of religion (*EC* 261).¹² This type of language is useful for “instruction, clarification, [and] controversy” and focuses on dealing with “facts” (*EC* 261). In the categories Lewis adopts from Alexander’s philosophy in *Space, Time and Deity*, reason resides in “Contemplation” and is one step removed from experience and “enjoyment,” turning reality into abstract propositional statements (*SBJ* 174). Reason looks on, evaluates, critiques, and stands objective and high above the messy world of experience. “Reason” is also the name of the woman who frees John from the giant in Lewis’s early allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. She, reminding us of Athene in Lewis’s poem, is “a sun-bright virgin clad in complete steel” (*PR* 68). “Reason” may be able to free John from a prison of

¹² These terms are found in Lewis’s paper “The Language of Religion.” He speaks of three types of language, “Ordinary,” “Scientific,” and “Poetic” (*EC* 255).

the narrow intellectual “Spirit of the Age,” but she cannot answer John’s question about the “Island in the West.” She can only tell John the things he already knows: “I can bring things out of the dark part of your mind into the light part of it. But now you ask me what is not even in the dark part of your mind” (*PR* 74). In his book, *Miracles*, Lewis repeats this concept, urging us to give up the reliance on reason alone: “For Reason knows that she cannot work without materials” (144). Reason may be able to deal objectively with the facts, but reason alone cannot obtain new data for itself.

Lewis is concerned with a loss of meaning that comes when “factual realism is dominant” (*WG* 114). What happens, he wonders, if a man subjects his experience of love to analytical inspection? The results of such an analysis may begin to be viewed “as truer than his experience,” and serve to empty love itself of meaning (*WG* 114). The experience lives in a person’s imaginative realm, where love can be enjoyed (*GID* 65). During the experience, one stands directly in the sunbeam, in a state of “Enjoyment,” (as opposed to “Contemplation”), receiving the view that goes beyond the toolshed, up into the sunlight outside (*GID* 212).¹³ This image comes from another essay, Lewis’s “Meditation in a Toolshed,” where the reason is busy with “looking at” the sunbeam, a step away from the actual experience. Enjoyment occurs when a person experiences the light itself—this is what Lewis calls the practice of “looking along” (*GID* 212).

In Lewis’s types of language, the “poetic” comes the closest to expressing the imaginative world. It endeavours to show the quality of a thing, to make visible the concrete reality that has been received through the senses (*EC* 257). Lewis suggests that “poetic” language may come the closest to a “natural language for religion” (*EC* 261). Mysticism and

¹³ Lewis applies the terms “enjoyment” and “contemplation” that he got from Alexander’s *Space, Time and Deity* in the essay “Mediation in a Toolshed” found in the book *God in the Dock*. Here he argues that both are valid ways of looking.

spiritual experience break down under “introspection” and theological language (*WG* 106). Yet, in order to have any sort of religious debate, terms must be “as definable and univocal as possible” and thus end up abstracted, and separated from the thing itself (*EC* 261). The tension cannot be avoided. Lewis notes that even the teachings of Christ avoid theological language—they are not given or organized in any “systematic fashion” that would appeal to our reason (*RP* 112). Christ’s teaching “cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, cannot be ‘got up’ as if it were a ‘subject’” (*RP* 113). Christ taught through parable, paradoxes, and questions—methods that seem to slip out of reason’s grasp. This difficulty goes beyond spiritual matters: any emotional experience, like the man in love, contains untidy bits that the reason cannot fit easily into its way of thinking or speaking. There are things within experience that cannot be communicated through “scientific” or “theological” language, things that resist definition, hovering on the edges of thought. In fact, Lewis concludes, “the normal state of experience” is beyond our rationalistic attempts in language (*EC* 263). The world outside is larger than the world in our minds.

Thus, according to Lewis, reason is by nature, limited.¹⁴ Lewis, however, is not suggesting a displacement or devaluing of reason. Reason must still be placed beside imagination; otherwise, belief would not be possible. Even if the divine is beyond our experience, Lewis would still have us attempt an understanding through words and analogy. The lower, natural, earthly images we have must be transposed into the higher images found in mythic and heavenly realms (*WG* 99). We must use what we have. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised if one image in the lower language is needed to stand for many things in the higher

¹⁴ Peter Schakel, in his book *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis*, traces the evolution of Lewis’s thought, finding that though he was concerned about both reason and imagination throughout his life, later in life he began privileging imagination over reason. Mark Freshwater, in his book, *C.S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth*, follows Schakel’s idea and traces Lewis’s gradual assimilation of ideas concerning the imagination and the supernatural. Kath Filmer, however, in the book titled *The Fiction of C.S. Lewis: Mask and Mirror*, argues that on several points (notably his views on the supernatural, and on women), Lewis’s beliefs remained consistent throughout his lifetime.

reality. In Lewis's sermon titled "Transposition," he insists that we cannot assume a "one-to-one correspondence" between systems—that would be allegory, not myth (*WG* 99).¹⁵ Elements in the lower system or language, like elements in our rational thought and earthly humanity, must carry more than one meaning in the higher system. The imagination has access to the higher system, sensing multiple meanings. However, when this new data is reviewed by the reason, it must use the same, limited signs of language and thought to somehow convey the vastness of the world beyond. Lewis calls the basic pattern "symbolism" in which letters and words (as signs) represent objects (the signified).

A second process, which builds on "symbolism," Lewis calls "sacramentalism"—important in any attempt to understand Lewis's concept of mythology and spirituality. In this process, the pictures in the natural world, which our reason is able to access, also exist elsewhere in Lewis's heavenly or mythic realm. Lewis uses the example of a painting, which signifies something beyond itself, but the painting is also part of the real world. The sign stands alone, separate from the signified object (like in "symbolism"), but also is present within the signified. Thus, the sign, which is part of the lower system, is made richer by its place in the higher reality; meaning is deepened (*WG* 102). Anyone, according to Lewis, who approaches the mythic from the lower realm, believing only in the facts of the more restricted system, would be limited to the details that they can see clearly already in their reason. The mythic realm beyond would hold no meaning for them. However, if we allow the possibility for a density of meaning beyond any conception within the facts, then suddenly the facts themselves mean more—they become edged about with alternatives and significance. There must be some trust and acknowledgement that the higher realm is present before reason can give freedom to the imagination.

¹⁵ "Transposition" was preached at the chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford on May 28, 1944. A section was added to the text in 1961 (*WG* 18-19). Owen Barfield believed that this essay outlines Lewis's theory of the imagination and shows how his mind worked (Duriez 92).

It may be helpful to make a small digression at this point. The terms “reality,” “facts,” and the “concrete” need to be defined in order to clarify Lewis’s ideas. “Reality” is a term with degrees of meaning in Lewis’s work. This has caused some confusion in the past, so it needs to be cleared up right away. In his book, *Miracles*, Nature is defined as something real, the things in Nature are “concrete, individual, determinate,” objects that exist (131). The physical material objects all around us, and even our own bodies, “are not mere principles or generalities or theorems, but things—facts—real, resistant existences” (*M* 138). Further reading in *Miracles* makes it clear that these three terms interconnect, and appear almost synonymous. Charles Starr, in his article “Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology in C. S. Lewis,” has an extensive footnote to clarify these terms. He places “facts,” “reality,” “events” (that which happens), history, and the “concrete” on the same plane.¹⁶ These, then, are the origin of the material through which the reason sorts. Reason, however, must constantly confront a problem: it cannot directly access the concrete world and must rely on the senses for input from that world. Once it has data, the reason produces “principles or generalities or theorems”—truths about the reality of Nature. Note that the terms “truth” and “abstract” do not reside on the same level with “reality” and “facts.”

This is a start, but considering Lewis’s Neoplatonic thinking, it is not enough. He may call Nature “reality,” but it is not the “ultimate reality” (*M* 105).¹⁷ Nature “is not the whole of reality, but only a part” (*M* 107). This is the basis for Lewis’s argument on the existence of miracles. He insists that we should rightly demand that “all reality should be consistent and systematic,” a fundamental requirement of the reason (*M* 97). However, the very fact that some

¹⁶ Charlie W. Starr. “Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology.” *Mythlore* 25.3/4 (2007): 161-189. Web. April 24, 2012. Footnote on p 166.

¹⁷ Detail about Lewis’s Neoplatonism can be readily found elsewhere, for instance, see Robert Houston Smith’s book *Patches of Godlight: The Pattern of Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981). See also the chapter titled “The Christian Platonism of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams” by Mary Carmen Rose (found in the book, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, vol 2). Further ideas are found in Lewis’s own writing—see the sections on Neoplatonism in his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (319-322, 392).

things do not fit might suggest that there is a Reality beyond Nature that can account for the odd fragments. If miracles, or, for the purposes of our topic here—the experiences of the imagination, “are real, they must, in the very act of [interrupting] assert all the more the unity and self-consistency of total reality at some deeper level” (*M* 97).

Lewis uses the terms “reality,” and “facts” in a secondary sense to refer to the perfect Form somewhere beyond. For Lewis, this is God: the “Reality” that the intellectual ghost in *The Great Divorce* is not ready to meet (40). God is the “eternal, self-existent, rational Being” (*M* 43), the “basic, original, self-existent Fact which exists in its own right” (*M* 46). Reality also refers to the ‘thing itself,’ the domain of eternity and heaven (*WG* 33). Nature is not the “self-existent Fact” for Lewis, she is fallen, and needs redemption just like the human race (*M* 105). Later in *Miracles*, Lewis states that “God is basic Fact or Actuality, the source of all other facthood . . . If He exists at all, He is the most concrete thing there is, the most individual” (*M* 145). The Form, outside our frame of time must be “itself concrete” in order for anything else to be concrete (*M* 138). The abstract cannot produce the concrete—Lewis’s example is the practice of bookkeeping (a task of the reason). Bookkeeping does not create money (the concrete object), but relies on money in order to exist (*M* 139). The lower fact is created by the prior existence of the higher Fact. Thus, just as the senses allow reason to work with the reality of Nature, so the imagination is needed to bring glimpses of the eternal or otherworldly Reality into the reason. When Lewis speaks of the imagination reflecting Reality or experiencing the Concrete, this refers to a connection with the source of all other reality. To make this clear, this paper will refer to Realities that exist outside “the little frame of earthly experience” with an initial capital letter, and the lower concrete facts with initial lowercase letters (*Pere* 147).

This, then, clarifies what Lewis said about the poverty of “factual realism” (*WG* 114). “Realism” is one step away from “reality,” an attempt of the reason to put the facts into words—a lower system attempting to explain the higher system (the concrete love experience reduced to explanation). The difference between the terms “realism” and “reality” will be important later, in the discussion of story and narrative in chapter four. A “realistic” text attempts to portray the facts of reality in such a way that it almost seems to be reality itself. Lewis says that realistic texts are “constructs, *entia rationis*; not facts on a level with the here and now” like the man’s experience of love or the reality of so many papers to mark (*EIC* 69). When the facts are severed from experience and thus from reality, the imagination cannot be exercised and meaning is excluded. The man in love has artificially restricted himself to the reason, attempting “factual realism,” putting scientific language to use. Yet, there is nothing from beyond, nothing from the higher Fact system seeping in—that could only be attained through the experience and the use of the imagination. Any transcendental quality that love might have held dissipates, and the love is devalued.

Lewis uses the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to illustrate our dilemma (*GID* 66). Eurydice is the reality, the ‘thing itself’ that Orpheus has braved the underworld to bring back. As long as he looks forward, permitted only to hold her hand (and thus to use only the “exploring touch” of imagination), he can experience the concrete reality of his beloved. Yet it is not enough: he looks back at her, drifting into the comfortable, clear-sighted intellect. Eurydice is suddenly gone. She has become only an abstract concept in his mind, the real woman cannot continue to exist. He cannot have it both ways. The imagination, for Lewis, is able “to taste and not to know” (*GID* 65).

A further limitation of the reason concerns Lewis—reason relies on language to express and define the concrete/Concrete, but language itself is not a pure rational system. Lewis argues in the essay “Bluspels and Flalansferes” that all language is metaphorical in varying degrees. He is confronting the belief that “scientific” language can be pure, and exempt from any figurative origin. The real situation, he suggests, is not a “freedom from a given metaphor,” in language but a “freedom to choose between that metaphor and others” (*R* 151). Any attempt at producing a more literal language system, is only to “reshuffle the buried metaphors” that we have forgotten about (*R* 152). It is impossible to be strictly literal, and any attempt to purify language will only result in a reduction of meaning. The reason cannot speak alone; there will always be intrusions from “poetic” language and from the workings of the imagination. Lewis concludes this essay with the placement of imagination beside reason: “reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying the old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition” (*R* 157). The reason’s strength is found in its ability to abstract truths, and in attempting a literal expression of those truths in language, but it needs the concrete experience as a prior condition of knowledge. Thus, any stated belief must at some point resort to “metaphor and symbol” (*WG* 133). This is especially true with “theological language” because it speaks about spiritual Realities outside of Nature, so the language “symbols” used “are not rationally but imaginatively understood” (Carnell, *Bright* 72). Michael Christensen, in his work titled *C. S. Lewis on Scripture*, sums up the dilemma: “The human predicament, on the deepest level, is man trying rationally to understand or consume a Reality which can only be imaginatively envisioned or spiritually tasted” (56). Consequently, according to Lewis, as soon as the reason attempts to speak about things beyond the “physical objects” in

Nature, it becomes “necessarily metaphorical” (*WG* 134). The very tool reason must use is complicated by layers of meaning, some of which are only accessible by the imagination.

Thus, imagination powerfully adds to life, and makes knowing possible. The advantage of “poetic language” is that it gives us experiences that we have never had or may never be able to have (*EC* 260).¹⁸ It gives us a dim sight of the places beyond the clear map in our reason (*EC* 260). Peter Schakel defines Lewis’s faculty of the imagination as a mental process that “connects things that were previously unconnected not through a logical or intellectual process but through association, intuition, or inspiration” (*Imagination* 4-5). Though it may seem that Lewis privileges the imagination at times, he recognizes that it cannot work alone. The imagination can receive and reflect the heavenly realm, but it is not “a step towards” it, only “an image” of the higher (*SBJ* 136). It contains “the shape of reality” but not the “thing itself” (*SBJ* 136). Since the imagination can only experience Reality, it can be no end in itself. Without the assertion of the will based on the deduction of the reason, there can be no belief. As the first step in the process, the imagination receives (and thus also trusts) Reality, and then the reason takes the new data and attempts definition. Finally, an assertion can be made. Lewis found for himself that the imagination “contained no element either of belief or of ethics; however far pursued, it would never have made me either wiser or better” (*SBJ* 136). The two faculties must work together.

A further difficulty arises: what if the lower system of language operated by the reason cannot handle or even sort through the vast input coming through the imagination? Lewis believes that science and reason can only verify or falsify poetic language “in a limited degree and with a certain fringe of vagueness” (*EC* 260). Only small portions “out of the teeming

¹⁸ Mineko Honda, in the book *The Imaginative World of C. S. Lewis*, outlines Lewis’s belief about the imagination: “It perceives the meaning of the world, expresses that meaning, and enables us to participate in the metaphysical Reality” (1). He classifies Lewis’s theory of the imagination as Romantic and compares it to the ideas of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Proust.

complexity of every concrete reality” can be measured (*EC* 260). The “obscure and infinite” realm of Demeter cannot be fully framed in words. Somehow, some sort of “concord” must be created between the two faculties if belief is to be attained. Even here, though, if a temporary reconciliation is made and belief is entered, a problem persists. Lewis says that there is a difference between “imaginative enjoyment and intellectual assent” and suggests that belief may actually be hostile to the enjoyment of the experience (*WG* 120). Once enjoyment is codified and evaluated by the reason, can the soul move back into that wordless place and grow large again? Can the imagination work with material already residing in the intellect, already asserted to in belief? After the largeness and complexity has been simplified by the reason, is there a way to maintain the excess? Lewis uses the example of pagan mythology: once it was no longer a belief system, the poets could delight in its richness (*WG* 119). What Christian Europe did imaginatively with pagan mythology, they could not do with their own “heaven and hell” (*AL* 83). The final stage in the reason, the yea, or nay, that equates to assent and belief seems to shut the door to fancy. The decision has been made, and no other variables can be admitted. So we live in our reason, safe with the facts we already know and believe. Yet, if meaning resides in the imagination, what happens in the soul when the imagination is buried and ignored?

Something remains, Lewis believes, a vague, ill-defined desire. Lewis called it “Senhsucht” in his own life—a strange joy visiting from elsewhere. In other places, he called it a “desire for our own far-off country” (*WG* 29), or a longing for that “sweet dim Isle of Apples over the wide sea’s breast” (*SIB* 74).¹⁹ Other names for this desire include “nostalgia,” “Romanticism,” and “beauty”; those wordless whispers that we find in books, or in music (*WG* 30). Lewis states, however, that what we desire does not reside “in them, it only came through them” (*WG* 31). We want something, and always more of it, but it is difficult to locate its source,

¹⁹ From the poem titled “Death in Battle” (l.3).

to define its outline, or to keep it once we find it. “We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become a part of it (*WG* 42). We want, in other words, a Concrete experience; we still desire the glimpses that the imagination receives.

It would be helpful, at least for the reason, to be able to put that thing we want, that “something else” into words. In a letter to Joan Lancaster, Lewis responds to her story that she sent to him for critique:

You describe your Wonderful Night v.[ery] well. That is, you describe the place & the people and the night and the feeling of it all, very well—but not the *thing* itself—the setting but not the jewel. And no wonder! Wordsworth often does just the same. His *Prelude* [. . .] is full of moments in which everything except the *thing* itself is described.

If you become a writer you’ll be trying to describe the *thing* all your life: and lucky if, out of dozens of books, one or two sentences, just for a moment, come near to getting it across. (*CL III* 765-6)²⁰

In another letter, Lewis is astonished to find such a line in one of Owen Barfield’s writing projects: “It’s not like a *passage in a book* at all: it’s a *thing*” (*CL II* 173).²¹ The “thing” equates with Reality, a solid object that can only be approached through the imagination. In another place, Lewis gives “heaven” as an example of “the thing itself,” a place outside of our experience approached only through symbols that originate in our earthly reality (the lower system trying to transpose into the higher) (*WG* 33). Desire persists simply because the mind becomes barren without these glimpses, tired of its own neat systems and haunted by the memory of the past—those times when the soul stumbled close to Beauty. We need the light coming into the toolshed

²⁰ June 26, 1956. Lewis is fond of italicizing specific words in his letters. This paper does not alter any of the italicized words in the letters.

²¹ Dec 12? 1935 (Exact date is in question according to the editor of the *Collected Letters*).

from without, not only to give the reason something to attend to, but also so we can find our way in the dark.

Myth as the “Partial Solution”

In his poem, “The Future of Forestry,” Lewis wonders how the distant memory of the beauty of trees will be passed on to children and awaken in their imagination after all the trees are gone (*Poems* 61).²² Teachers will try to explain and describe them, but the children with “their ill-acquainted / Fancy will tint their wonder-paintings” with goblins clothed in “silky green” and “wood romances” (l.19-22). The children, only “Half understanding” will, nevertheless, come closer to the image of a true tree than their elders—the ones who remember actual trees in nature (l. 19). The children will experience a sort of myth, removed from the history of trees, but closer to the ideal. Through their imaginations, they can “Catch from afar (for soul is watchful) / A sight of tree-delighted Eden” (l.26-27). While in the myth, the children will see more, sensing what the rest of us cannot see.

Myth, according to Lewis, provides a bridge, connecting the “peninsular world of thought” to the continent of our belonging (*GID* 66). In the poem, the children see Eden through the mist of the tree myth, unfettered by rational descriptions that the grown-ups have in their heads. Each soul is watchful for that place beyond, and myth provides a solution for our “tragic dilemma” of the mind—a bridge where the soul can cross from reason into imagination (*GID* 66). In his essay “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis comments that “in the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as abstraction” (*GID* 66). The trees, presented as an abstract concept, become alive and mysterious in the imagination, allowing the children to experience something solid beyond what their

²² This poem was originally published in *The Oxford Magazine*, LVI (Feb 10, 1938).

physical eyes can see. In the words of Stephen Thorson, as he reflects on Lewis's thought, the children are experiencing the "reality" of myth—it is not "truth in the sense of knowing *that*, but rather in the sense of knowing *what*" (3).²³ Like the example of the trees, myth adds a "rich significance" to the simplest, everyday things: "By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it" (*OTOW* 120). Lewis believes that all these things held a glory once, but now all is "hidden by 'the veil of familiarity,'" a veil that myth can tear away, at least for a time (*OTOW* 120). Lewis gives the example of a boy, stumbling upon a page of Milton, knowing nothing about the structure of the text, but finding, strangely, that some "new strength and width and brightness and zest have transformed his world" (*PPL* 61). This boy, like the children with their tree myth, "is nearer to the truth" than those who can explain how the text works (*PPL* 61).²⁴

We have a "predicament," says Lewis, which is met through myth: "It will always work, on those who can receive it, the same catharsis" (*OTOW* 131). In a letter to Joy Gresham, Lewis comments on a book by Arthur C. Clark: "We are almost brought up out of *psyche* into *pneuma*. I mean, his myth does that to us imaginatively" (*CL III* 391).²⁵ From the soul, up into the spirit, myth provides a temporary release from the human predicament—this earth-bound, restricted life. We live "*in hac valle abstractionis*," the place of separation (*GID* 66). Myth is the mountain above, a place where concrete Reality exists, and the origin for our innumerable streams of abstract truths in the valley (*GID* 66). The many truths in the lower system are needed to piece together one solid idea in the higher. We must be prepared for "complexity, and contradiction, and repetition" not only in the material world, but also in the world of ideas and art, says Annie

²³ Stephen Thorson. "Truth, Myth, and Revelation in Lewis." *The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 21.6 (1990): 1-6. Print.

²⁴ In *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*, Lewis hints at his mythic ideas through his discussion of poetic archetypes, explaining archetypes as the "words of a language which speaks the else unspeakable" (57).

²⁵ Dec 22, 1953.

Dillard (*Living* 171). One myth produces many meanings as it drops into our world, but someplace, up there on the mountain it is pure, simple, and concrete. “What flows into you from myth,” says Lewis “is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is)” (*GID* 66). We abstract truths from myth, but the myth itself lives the Reality. It is not a dichotomy between truth and lies, where myth is a lie that nevertheless clarifies our sight for the real truth in the valley. The truths we live by and believe cannot be abstracted from their opposite, falsehood; they must come from something greater, something more Real. The great myths are not lies that tell the truth, but realities that produce a multitude of truths for our reason to consider.

We may reside in the valley of separation, constantly required to evaluate with our reason the streams of truth around us, but that does not mean there must always be a separation between Reality and us. Myth is there—all we need to do is follow the streams up and receive the view from the mountain through our imaginations. Starr, in his article on the meaning of meaning in Lewis’s work, states that “There is, therefore, no place along the stream pouring from the mountain down into the valley where one may stop and say, ‘Here is truth but there is myth.’ The separation no longer exists. Experiencing and thinking simply become knowing.” (167-8). We will see the same things there that we do down here, but in a different way: the natural will be contained in the higher. Lewis gives an example in his review of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*: “In the book Eomer rashly contrasts ‘the green earth’ with ‘legends’. Aragorn replies that the green earth itself is ‘a mighty matter of legend’” (*OTOW* 120).

Often, however, we do not experience the myth, we lower it into the valley and search for the truths within it instead—this becomes an intellectual exercise and the name for it is “allegory” (*GID* 66). In Lewis’s work, allegory is very different than myth: allegory contains

specific correlations where this object points to that concept. Myth, however, cannot be broken into parts—the meaning exists in the whole (*CL II* 438).²⁶ In a letter to Father Peter Milward, Lewis notes that the myth ends up with many meanings that vary according to differing readers; the allegory has one set meaning, put into it specifically by the writer (*CL III* 789).²⁷ Lewis concludes by saying, “Into an allegory a man can put only what he already knows: in a myth he puts what he does not yet know and cd. not come to know in any other way” (*CL III* 789-790). Myth is beyond the domain of reason, able to reach into the unknown darkness. Since it is so complex (yet so simple in structure) and dense with meaning, myth can become the “master key” to open up doors within each individual reader’s world (*OTOW* 115).

Yet, the division between allegory and myth is not so easy to pinpoint at times. Lewis felt that “when allegory is at its best, it approaches myth” and like myth, needs the faculty of the imagination for reception (*PR* 11-12). Lewis had hope that his own allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, would also contain “some touch of mythical life” and would go beyond direct explanation (*PR* 12). Lewis is also concerned about the mind of the reader, fascinated with why some readers gain insight or enjoyment from a text, and others do not. In his essay “On Stories,” Lewis posits a division not only between texts (the stories that can give enjoyment and those that cannot) but also between readers (*OTOW* 26). For Lewis, the “same story may be mythical or symbolical to one person and allegorical to another” (*CL II* 438).²⁸ A person’s reception of myth thus varies as to the cast of mind that is brought to the myth. The children can glimpse the tree myth because the image is new and all they have is their imaginations to use. Is it possible for the grown-ups to see back into Eden, with their minds already filled with an abstracted outline of a

²⁶ Aug 18, 1940.

²⁷ Sept 22, 1956.

²⁸ This quote comes from a letter to Eliza Marian Bulter, Aug 18, 1940. She was interested in Lewis’s ideas about symbolism from his book *The Allegory of Love*.

tree? They know only the allegory, filled with the tree as fact; they cannot see the tree as myth. This brings us back to the original dilemma: how can those stuck in reason move into imagination and beyond into a fusion of both? What if they cannot receive the myth as a myth and are unable to begin crossing the bridge while others sense its presence and walk boldly across?

What does it take? Lewis suggests a shift to valuing the imagination, for “myth must be grasped with the imagination not with the intellect” (*PR* 12). One must set the intellect aside, at least for a time, and search for meaning that is more “intuitive” rather than truth gained through deduction (Starr 171). The idea of reception is key: “It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely” (*GID* 66). The emotions that are aroused by myth result from this “prior act of attending to or looking towards something” (*EC* 264). One must dare to stand within the sunbeam and “look along,” to get involved and let the whole person be affected. In the realm of Scripture, as with any text filled with “poetic” language, instead of the “theological” or “scientific,” this openness is essential. In one essay, Lewis insists that if “religious sayings . . . should happen to contain information about real things, you will not get it on any other terms”—one must “meet them with a certain good will, a certain readiness to find meaning” (*EC* 266). This applies to any text with a mythical element. The person, who insists on abstracted facts alone, will remain in what they already know, for the imaginative meaning cannot be attained through the reason. Lewis’s response to the Russians, who claimed that they could not find God in space, equally applies to myth: “What is required is a certain faculty of recognition” (*EC* 62). Reception of myth requires both attention and openness—the characteristics of an active imagination willing to move, to change, and to be changed.

The teachers believe in trees, they hold in their memory their form and structure, they have settled that in their intellects and asserted to the past reality of trees. Is this, like all other beliefs, hostile to the imagination? Lewis qualifies his earlier statement on belief and the imagination and suggests that this is not always the case. Once reason accepts a belief, a different sort of “aesthetic satisfaction” can result—“there is a dignity and poignancy in the bare fact that a thing exists” (*WG* 121). Beliefs can become “poetries” to those who believe in them, and produce a deeper enjoyment that is the result, not the cause of their belief (*WG* 122). In fact, Lewis asserts that “all worldviews yield poetry to those who believe them,” holding a meaning that is lost on those outside. In the case of Christianity, Lewis says that the Gospels remain elusive to all those who attempt to systematize them within the intellect; the Gospels demand more, a response from the “whole man” (*RP* 113). Myth, functions as a “door into the human heart,” and goes where “analytic rationalism” cannot because myth does not attempt to “ignore the transcendent, as if it did not exist” (Hein 18). For Lewis, myth and imagination must be part of belief, even Christian belief. It simply is not possible to have “direct ‘knowledge about’ (*savoir*) the ultimate Being” (*FL* 115). At times, however, we can by “Grace” have “some ‘knowledge-by-acquaintance’ (*connaître*), some ‘tasting’ of Love Himself” (*FL* 115). We see through the imagination, and come to knowledge through analogy and symbol. Even in religion (and perhaps more so than in any other place), myth operates, allowing the reason to briefly transcend its limitations and accept the experience of the imagination.

This chapter must end however, with a limiting factor, remembering that Lewis called myth only a “partial solution” (*GID* 66). Lewis believes that something else transcends myth, something more powerful and longer lasting. Myth may carry and reflect Reality, but it is not Reality itself. The “something else” that myth gives us a glimpse of, that thing we long to find

and enjoy, still recedes. Myth allows for experience, for the imagination to actively live concretely for a brief time, but we cannot remain there—our predicament continues. We are still confined to time and history, bound by the succession of moments that we live within. Myth is removed from this, alone and pure on its mountaintop, undisturbed by the rushing and mingling streams below. We will get to Lewis's provisional solution later, but for now, we need to consider Lewis's specific views on myth in regards to pagan mythology and the Incarnation.

Chapter 2: Lewis's Mythic Focus

Pagan Mythology

As a boy, Lewis was haunted and moved by mythology—the vast “northernness” of the Norse sagas, their “remoteness, severity,” washed over him with a renewal of the joy he had first met in childhood (*SBJ* 62). Lewis would later call the discovery of these tales an “imaginative Renaissance”—he found that the *thing*, the joy he desired, came through mythology (*SBJ* 65). In a letter to Owen Barfield, during their “Great War” exchange of letters, Lewis sets down his definition of mythology:

A *myth* is a description or a story introducing supernatural personages or things, determined not, or not only, by motives arising from events within the story, but by the supposedly immutable relations of the personages or things: possessing unity: and not, save accidentally, connected with any given place or time. (*CL III* 1619)²⁹

His definition notes that myth requires the presence of the supernatural, an internal unity within the myth itself, and the importance of a separation from the particular and local, thereby setting myth into another time and place outside of history. A few years later, in the conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson, Lewis protests their belief that myth can be contained in a true story, “myths are lies,” he says, “even though lies breathed through silver” (Carpenter 147). Though he loved and revered the great myths, at this time Lewis lived deep in the belief that they were false and thus removed from any rational and historical account of reality.

²⁹ This letter is numbered four in Series 1 of the “Great War” letters and was possibly written in 1927 (There is no date attached to it in the *Collected Letters*). A similar definition is quoted in Walter Hooper, *Past Watchful Dragons* from a notebook of Lewis’s (286): “A *Myth* is the description of a state, an event, or a series of events, involving a particular time or place, and dependent for its contents not on motives developed in the course of action but on the immutable relations of the personages” (MS 15, fol. 138).

In a 1946 essay titled “Religion without Dogma,” Lewis outlines the various options for the origins of mythology (*GID* 131).³⁰ Some individuals, he remarks, count mythology as “literally true” (*GID* 131). Mircea Eliade’s later definition fits here: where myth is the narration of a “*sacred history*” that took place *in illo tempore*, a “*true history* of what came to pass at the beginning of Time” (*Myths* 23).³¹ Other views include myth as allegorical truth, “as confused history,” “as priestly lies,” or Frazer’s “agricultural ritual” that gets “mistaken for propositions” (*GID* 131-2).³² Most of these options (aside from the first one) contain some element of falsehood, although individuals within their respective religion and rituals may believe their personal myths are true. In this essay, Lewis is not restricting his own definition to any single one of these options. He adds the supernatural to this list, considering both the divine and the diabolical as possible origins of mythology. For Lewis, mythology is a human system, informed and guided by the supernatural, and as such, has a mixture of sources, including “true history, allegory, ritual, [and] the human delight in story telling” (*GID* 132).

In Lewis’s fictional world of *Perelandra*, Ransom sees Mars and Venus and immediately connects them with the mythological Ares and Aphrodite. He is puzzled—since earth “has been besieged” and occupied by an evil enemy, how did humans learn of and copy the true supernatural beings that he is now meeting (*Pere* 201)? Ransom discovers that “traces of the celestial commonwealth are not quite lost,” and some memory of “Deep heaven” survives even on earth (*Pere* 201). What was once thought to be false must be “based on a solider reality than we dream,” he concludes (*Pere* 201). The “solder reality” Ransom is meeting is the Perfect

³⁰ A similar list is included in *Miracles*, published in 1947—the paper “Religion without Dogma” was read to the Socratic Club on May 20, 1946 (*GID* 14).

³¹ Eliade’s book comes after most of Lewis’s work on myths, in 1960. Mircea Eliade. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*. Tran. Philip Mairet. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960. Print.

³² Anthropologist Sir James George Frazer first published *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* in 1890. Lewis mentions reading it in his diary on January 4, 1923 (*AMR* 170).

Form beyond all earthly mythological stories. It is confused now, a mixing of “celestial strength and beauty” with human, impure elements. According to Lewis mythology “at its best” is “a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination” (*M* 218). Myth may be “fact” in some other place (*Pere* 102). In Lewis’s short story, “Forms of Things Unknown,” he places Medusa on the moon. While existing only in ancient mythology on earth, she is alive and deadly on the moon; Medusa is a Fact there (*DT* 119-128). Perhaps, says Lewis, the things in myth that may be “scattered through other worlds as realities” (*Pere* 45), could also be greater Realities in an eternal, heavenly realm. In a letter to Mary Neylan, he considers the connection between time and eternity:

After all, if there *is* an eternal world and if our world is its manifestation, then you would expect bits of it to ‘stick through’ into ours. We are like children pulling the levers of a vast machine of which *most* is concealed. We see a few little wheels that buzz round on *this* side when we start it up—but what glorious or frightful processes we are initiating in there, we don’t know. (*CL II* 394)³³

What might eternal things look like when they “stick through” and would we be able to recognize them when they do? Could mythology aid the imagination in some way, making it more sensitive to otherworldly Reality?

In *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, the things that “stick through” are called “pictures” that produce desire in the inhabitants of Pagus (172). John learns from History, that the picture is not always the same; sometimes it is an image of a superhuman race, other times the picture tells a story, or looks like a beautiful woman (*PR* 172-3). Every picture is a message that can lead a pagan to “where true joys are to be found” (*PR* 172). Those who study the picture carefully also turn and see within the real, human world something “hiding, yet not quite hidden, like

³³ April 18, 1940.

something even more about to be” (*PR* 174). The hidden secret is the presence of a different Reality within the reality of Nature. Lewis himself learns that the desire the pictures awakened leads beyond them, to an “Object . . . further away, more external, less subjective, than even such a comparatively public and external thing as a system of mythology” (*SBJ* 136-7). For those who look long enough, myth is simply the carrier or the reflector of the “Thing” hidden behind. In the land of Pagus many messages were sent, but all were connected, the newer simply bringing the older into a “fuller light” (*PR* 175).

Though mythology is distorted in human hands, Lewis believes that it holds bits of Truth, a “divine hinting in poetic and ritual form,” pictures sent by a benevolent Landlord as a “*praeparatio evangelica*” (*GID* 132).³⁴ There seems to be something significant “in that persistent *motif* of blood, death, and resurrection, which runs like a black and scarlet cord through all the greater myths,” writes Lewis to his friend Arthur (*CL II* 35).³⁵ Lewis begins to view pagan mythology as the “first shadowy approach” (*CL II* 35), the “good dreams” sent by a

³⁴ A note needs to be made here to clarify the term “truth” somewhat similar to the digression about “reality” and “fact” in chapter one. Lewis again seems to use the term on two levels, sometimes in a heavenly sense, other times strictly confined to earth. In *Perelandra*, Ransom realizes that the “triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial” (143-4). There is a place where truth, myth, and fact are all equivalent—Lewis calls it heaven. Truth is still present on earth, but it is separated from myth and fact. “Fact,” in Lewis’s terms refers to the plane of reality, the concrete part in Nature. Truth, on earth, is abstracted from myth and fact, and thus one step removed from reality. In the essay “Myth Became Fact,” myth is connected with reality, but not directly with truth: “What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down in the valley” (*GID* 66). A person experiences reality through the myth, and then stands back and uses the reason to abstract truths from the mythic experience. In the essay “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” Lewis calls the reason “the natural organ of truth,” distancing truth from the imagination which deals instead with meaning (*R* 157). Meaning, then, is “the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood” (*R* 157). On earth, the reason separates true and false statements, forming opinions about what resides in the “organ of meaning.” The intellectual ghost in *The Great Divorce* is told that he had “experienced truth only with the abstract intellect” while on earth (40). When bound by time, the only way to approach truth is in the innumerable streams in the valley, abstracted from myth and reality. In heaven, the ghost is given the chance to “taste [truth] like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom” (*GD* 40). In heaven, Truth is a Person, the One Lewis names as God, and thus is the Divine Myth, and the Eternal Fact as well. This is why Ransom can say that there is no distinction between them. Truth resides in the plural on earth, fragmented and separated from its source, like a dream vision separated from real life. The pattern beyond is “so large” that the pieces on earth that do not seem to fit together (like myth and truth) are perfectly connected there (*Pere* 147).

³⁵ January 10, 1932.

kind supernatural Being (*MC* 54), the “mere beginnings—the first faint whisper of the wind from beyond the world” (*TST* 430).³⁶ In Lewis’s allegory, John comes through the mountain, “dying many deaths,” and learning many things—but he is confused about Wisdom’s words on mythology (*PR* 190). A voice behind him, however, says that “it is My mythology,” calling it “an image, not the very real” (*PR* 190).³⁷ Mythology is a “veil” that hides the face of another and is used specifically for that purpose. Whoever this voice belongs to, he is the “thing itself,” the Reality behind the veil. This voice suggests there may be a real god who dies and resurrects, the idea hidden behind similar pictures within the earthly mythologies. The voice continues: “For this end I made your senses and for this end your imagination, that you might see My face and live” (*PR* 190). John, suddenly immersed in mythology and learning to see with his imagination, is experiencing the Real behind the veil of earthly myth. Strangely, during this whole imaginative experience, John does not leave the character “Reason behind” but finds that she is more present than before (*PR* 191). Who or What has John found in mythology that is able to somehow reconcile both reason and imagination?

³⁶ Letter to Arthur Greeves, November 8, 1931.

³⁷ See Peter Schakel’s book *Reason and Imagination* for a discussion on this passage, specifically in regards to myth as an “image” and not “fact” (123-5). Schakel finds that this passage does not fit with the ideas in the essay “Myth Became Fact.” In *The Pilgrim’s Regress* the Divine voice says that “mythology” belongs to Him, it is “truth” and “image” not “fact” or “real.” In “Myth Became Fact,” myth allows an experience of “reality” not “truth.” Schakel explains that Lewis has just shifted his thinking about myth in the time between *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and the later essay (*Reason* 123). He notes that Lewis changed his thinking on the concept of truth: in the earlier text, the emphasis is on mythologies containing truth from God (they are not complete lies, in other words); in the later essay, Lewis is combating the focus on “abstract truths” (*Reason* 124). However, another possibility (and one that might make Schakel’s argument clearer), is to consider the dualistic definitions for these terms—there is earthly reality and truth, and there is heavenly Reality and Truth. There does not need to be any shift in Lewis’s thinking to make the two texts work together. The passage in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is discussing earthly systems of mythology (later in the passage the Divine voice mentions the “story of Semele” and corn and wine as images of the dying and living God in pagan lands). Earthly mythologies are images, containing earthly truths (that connect with a Divine Reality, but are abstracted from that Reality); they are not the Divine Myth. In the later essay, Lewis is discussing the Divine Myth, the actual dying and living God, who comes to earth through the Incarnation. Experience of the heavenly Myth allows Reality to flow into the imagination, but experience of earthly mythologies allows only an image of the real, and thus only earthly truths to flow into the mind. Thus Schakel’s summary—“Myth, therefore, remains limited: it is a veil, something one must ultimately get past if one is to experience reality”—needs to be qualified (*Reason* 125). A difference between Divine and earthly myth needs to be specified. Based on the position of this paper a re-wording like this would make things clearer: Earthly mythologies remain limited: they are veils, something one must ultimately get past if one is to experience Divine Reality and Divine Myth.

Lewis later writes in *Surprised by Joy* that he began to ask where religion reaches “its true maturity?” and where “have the hints of Paganism been fulfilled?” (188). He describes Paganism in this passage as the “childhood of religion,” an early “prophetic dream” (*SBJ* 188). If there is falsehood in pagan mythology, it is the falseness of a “garbled version” of historical fact that “lives in popular report” (*RP* 107). It is the falseness of the trees the children imagined compared with the Real trees—those original trees back in Eden. For Lewis, the “divine hinting” pointed to “Christianity as the completion, the actualization, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man” (*GID* 132). In a letter to Arthur Greeves, Lewis calls “Christianity the thing itself” (*TST* 430).³⁸ All these “pictures” and “hints” within the mythologies concerning a dying and resurrecting god came to fulfillment in the Incarnation. Lewis cites two ways of looking at mythology: either pagan mythology is a devilish “counterfeit” and rightly holds the label of “lies” or mythology has divine elements (and thus contains Truth) that points to and prepares individuals for Christ (*RP* 106). Lewis, because of that conversation with Tolkien and Dyson, begins to believe the second option. The importance of sacrifice in both pagan mythologies and Christianity becomes the key for Lewis’s understanding of myth. The theme of sacrifice, hinted at in the best earthly mythologies, comes to fruition at the Incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Christ.

The Turn: Myth + Fact

Lewis suggests that there once was a time (perhaps in Eden) when men did not need mythology, hints, and dreams—man’s original abilities to see have been lost. In the poem, “The Country of the Blind” (*Poems* 33-4) Lewis imagines a nation of eyeless men, blind now from their own

³⁸ November 8, 1931.

desire for safety against the “guns of heav’n” (l. 8).³⁹ In their darkness, they think little of the words used in the past, “talking of *light* in some / Eunuch’d etiolated, / Fungoid sense, as a symbol of / Abstract thoughts” (l. 10-13). They are like the individuals that Lewis confronts in the essay “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” creating a “semantic nightmare” by their belief that language can be pure, literal, and without the complication of metaphor (*R* 133-158). What if someone with eyes came along, Lewis wonders, and described the actual things he saw? The blind men would still have words like *see* and *dark*, but they would now be used in a figurative sense, where *see* means to “understand,” and *dark* may mean “difficult” (*EC* 265). The words would be robbed of their density of meaning, abstracted from their original reality. The man would be laughed at and told he is only “concocting a myth, taking the words for things,” or that he may be expressing emotion, not reality (l. 26). Which of the two is actually seeing the real—the blind men with their precise terms or the man who seems to speak in myth? What if what we now call myth is closer to the Truth? The poem ends with Lewis’s belief that things were not always this way; men dare to speak on truths that were once “Opaque, carved in divine forms, irremovable, / Dread but dear as a mountain— / Mass, stood plain to the inward eye” (l. 30-32).

According to Lewis, there was a time when words meant more, when humans could see the real/Real when they used the words for their secondary meanings: to *understand* really meant to *see* reality/Reality. Lewis places the separation between the reason and the imagination at the Fall of man and his exile from Eden. While Ransom experiences myth as fact on the planet Perelandra, he realizes “that the triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial—was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall” (*Pere* 143-4). Marjorie Wright, in her dissertation examining kingdoms of

³⁹ This poem was originally published in *Punch* CCXXI (Sept 1951), p 303. Lewis wrote a prose equivalent to this poem in the essay titled “The Language of Religion” (*EC* 265-6).

myth, comments on this idea of Lewis's: the "myth-history distinction is an arbitrary one based on the presence of evil and the fall of man, a result of separations in the universe never meant to exist" (*Cosmic* 142). Some may equate myth with falsehood now, but perhaps it was not always so. The trees were real in Eden, and even now, some still have eyes to see them. Is it possible, however, for the blind—those stuck in the reason's abstracted language—to see again?

Hidden within pagan mythology is the idea of a dying god, an idea that Lewis positions within the "heaven of legend and imagination" (*GID* 66) and that speaks directly to the "savage, child, poet" within everyone, and perhaps also to the blind (*GID* 67). There is hope that the dilemma is not our final state, that somehow reason and imagination can be united again.

Ransom muses, "Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final" (*Pere* 144). What was hidden within pagan mythology comes to light in Christianity. The dying god myth needed to enter into the realm of history, reality, and fact. Ransom concludes that the "beginning of its disappearance," this soul-inhibiting division between myth and truth on earth, occurred at the "Incarnation" (*Pere* 144). Suddenly, what was once only an idea, a mythological dream on earth, comes to actually happen—the dying god idea becomes fact. Lewis insists that the particularity of the Incarnation, its time and space specificity, is what makes Christianity the fulfillment of pagan mythology. The event, the dying god, occurs in the "earth of history" and triggers measurable historical consequences (*GID* 66). In a letter to Warfield Firor, Lewis outlines his view: "The Incarnation. He is a Jew. Our Lord, besides being the divine Thou is also a historical character, who must be considered as He. Indeed this is the essence of our faith. 'Crucified under Pontius Pilate'—date, & signature of a civil servant & all, crude, historical event." (*CL III* 631).⁴⁰ For Lewis, "The Christian story is about a historical

⁴⁰ July 11, 1955.

personage,” whose death and resurrection becomes the cornerstone for the whole history of the church (*WG* 128-9).

Based on Lewis’s conception of pagan mythology, the event of the Incarnation comes as no surprise for him. It is like “something *coming gradually into focus*” the slow progress within heathen religions of a “vague and mythical” idea, “a god who is killed and broken and then comes to life again” (*EC* 324-5). The dying god of myth is “not historical”—there is no specificity of place and time (*EC* 325). The Old Testament begins to distill these ideas into a religious system, “connected with a particular nation” (*EC* 325). Finally, “in the New Testament the *thing really happens*. The dying god really appears—as a historical Person, living in a definite place and time” (*EC* 325). In his essay titled “Is Theology Poetry?” Lewis repeats these ideas, situating the pagan myths with their yearly dying and rising of gods as a precursor to the “real event”: “It is not the difference between falsehood and truth . . . It is like watching something come gradually into focus; first it hangs in the clouds of myth and ritual, vast and vague, then it condenses, grows hard and in a sense small, as a historical event in first century Palestine” (*WG* 129). A few years after this passage was written, in his book *Miracles*, Lewis attempts to meet the objection that Christ is “simply another corn-king,” the Gospels as a story that conveniently makes use of a previous theme popular in the yearly cycles of pagan ritual (*M* 181). According to Lewis, the Gospels conspicuously lack the sort of imagery and analogies that traditionally go along with the pagan stories—the Gospels present the central event of the “Nature-religions” but within a culture “where no trace of Nature-religion was present” (*M* 183).⁴¹ Lewis decides it must be the other way around, that the dying god event in the Gospels is not derivative of the corn-king pattern. Instead, he considers Christ the original Corn-King, the

⁴¹ Lewis notes here that the imagery of the dying seed dying that produces new life is only mentioned twice in the Gospels. He expected more of this type of analogy since the central theme of the Gospels is the life and death of Christ (*M* 182).

Reality behind, which the human imagination vaguely saw through “the facts of Nature” (*M* 186). The mythology is an image of, but is not the “Thing itself.” Christ is what all “religious history . . . anticipates,” the “Origin” of everything else (*RP* 27).

This is what Lewis means when he says that Myth has become fact. The Real Myth became a historical fact; “The essential meaning of all things came down from the ‘heaven’ of myth to the ‘earth’ of history” (*WG* 129-30). What is Reality in an otherworldly sense (what we term Myth) became reality in a physical sense; what once was only intuited through the imagination came to be known through the senses of those present in first century Palestine. Lewis considers the Hebrews, like all other nations, the holders of a mythology, except that in this case, this was a particular “mythology chosen by God to be the vehicle of the earliest sacred truths” that only became “incarnate as History” in the New Testament (*M* 218). This mixing of Myth and fact is the origin of the character of the Gospel texts. Lewis, as a literary critic well versed in mythologies, found that the Gospels “had not the mythical taste,” and were written in an “artless, historical fashion” (*SBJ* 188). Yet, their very subject matter was the theme of the “great myths” (*SBJ* 188). In “Fern-Seed and Elephants,” Lewis concludes that there are two possible ways of approaching the Gospels: “Either this is reportage—though it may no doubt contain errors—pretty close up to the facts; nearly as close as Boswell. Or else, some unknown writer in the second century anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind” (*EC* 244-5).⁴² The narrative of the Gospels, this story of the beginning of the Christian community, holds within it the strange theme of the dying and resurrecting god of pagan mythology. What Lewis calls either a journalist-type text or a “novelistic, realistic narrative,” becomes the vehicle for divine Myth.

⁴² This essay is titled “Fern-Seed and Elephants” in the book *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, but was originally titled “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism.” It was read at Westcott House, Cambridge on May 11, 1959.

Lewis has little interest in demythologizing the Gospels; he prefers the presence of the miraculous within a narrative, within a historical-sounding text.⁴³ The “Grand Miracle,” according to Lewis, not only includes the fact that Christ incarnated into history, died, and rose again, but also that He did not lose any of his Mythical Reality—God became man but remained God. The Myth was not discarded in favour of history. When viewed from an earthly position this becomes a set of paradoxes. The heavenly Myth, once “glimpsed in dream and symbol and the acted poetry of ritual becomes small, solid—no bigger than a man” (*WG* 130). There is the very real sense of “humiliation” as the Myth became fact (*WG* 130). Somehow, in this paradox of space, the greatness of what is Beyond merges into the present reality on earth, yet “leads to a greater glory,” or what Lewis calls a “still deeper poetry” (*WG* 130). Lewis also considers the paradox of time, how the Myth, residing in eternity, could take up the guise of time without discarding the Eternal Reality. Lewis resolves this (inadequate though any such resolutions may be) by calling the Incarnation an eternal event, not “an episode in the life of God” (*EC* 46).⁴⁴ He continues, “The taking up into God’s nature of humanity, with all its ignorances and limitations, is not itself a temporal event, though the humanity which is so taken up was, like our own, a thing living and dying in time” (*EC* 46). What became earthly fact for a time is itself an eternal Fact. For Lewis, the Incarnation is an eternal Reality—in heaven, it is both Myth and Fact, and when Christ invaded time, Myth became earthly reality and fulfilled the earthly myth already

⁴³ Mark Freshwater has a chapter in *C. S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth* detailing Lewis’s relationship to New Testament scholarship, specifically in regards to the search for the “historical Jesus” (55-82). These scholars attempted to demythologize Christ by removing the miracles from the Gospel texts, and thus uncover the “real” man and place the Gospels onto a more rational, objective footing. Freshwater says, “Lewis felt he had to reject their findings or reject what gave Christianity its mythic power. Lewis sensed a numinous presence in, with, and under the objective data that many New Testament scholars seemed to miss” (62).

⁴⁴ The centrality and eternity of the Incarnation is an important concept in A.M. Allchin’s book *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition*. He does not specifically place Lewis directly in this tradition, but does quote from Lewis’s *Oxford History of English Literature* in his section on Richard Hooker. A short line in the section “The Co-inherence of Human and Divine” fits directly with Lewis’s ideas here: Allchin is outlining the theology of Maximus the Confessor, in regards to the Incarnation, “‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’. But that is not an isolated incident. It is the focal point of all creation” (*Participation* 71).

existing in time. The separating line between Myth and fact is finally erased on earth. In the words of Ransom, "The Incarnation" is the "beginning of its disappearance," and man's dilemma is given a solution.

In Lewis's theology, myth/Myth cannot be escaped. The core of Christianity, the very part that is often attacked, is the mythical element; the "heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact" (*GID* 65, 66). The dying god theme becomes, for Lewis, the one "vital and nourishing element" (*GID* 64), the part of Christianity that "gives life" (*GID* 65). If one was to remove "all explanations and reinterpretations" from the Christian Creed, what would be left, says Lewis, is "something quite unambiguously supernatural, miraculous, and shocking" (*GID* 69). Alison Searle, in her article titled "Narrative, Metaphor, and Myth in C. S. Lewis's Testimonial Novel *Till We Have Faces*," outlines the importance of myth for those within the Christian worldview: "the hope to which joy entices, and the appetite which myth whets, is underwritten by a divine mythology, penetrating history, and assuring that while 'now we see in a mirror dimly,' we will then see 'face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12)" (231).⁴⁵ Lewis is not interested in removing Myth or miracle from the Gospels, attempting to fit them into the container of historical veracity alone and appease the reason's insistence on proofs and definitions. A place must be left for mystery and for the exercising of the imagination within the life of Christianity. If Christ fused Myth and fact and fulfilled earthly myth with heavenly Fact, then some room must be left for the "larger pattern" beyond the frame of our limited earthly existence (*Pere* 148). Near the end of his life, Lewis, in a letter, reminds us again that we are not to reduce everything to rational definition: "I think the ideas of sacrifice, Ransom, Championship (over Death), Substitution etc. are all images to *suggest* the reality (not otherwise

⁴⁵ Alison Searle. "Narrative, Metaphor and Myth in C. S. Lewis's Testimonial Novel *Till We Have Faces*." *Oral and Written Narratives and Cultural Identity: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Eds. Francisco C. Fagundes and Irene M. Blayer. New York: Peter Lang P, 2007. 225-244. Print.

comprehensible to us) of the Atonement. To fix on any *one* of them as if it contained and limited the truth like a scientific definition wd. in my opinion be a mistake” (*CL III* 1476).⁴⁶ All doctrines abstracted from the Myth are “*less* true” than the Myth itself; for Lewis “they are translations into our *concepts* and *ideas* of that which God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection” (*TST* 428). Christianity must not ignore the imagination, for reception and belief cannot occur without the use of both faculties. Individuals not only must assent to the historical fact with the reason, but also must experience the Incarnation as Myth with an “imaginative embrace” (*GID* 67). Myth must have a place within Christianity—Lewis has hope that the few who still have eyes and sight may be listened to after all, that the “divine forms” may again loom large as a “mountain - / Mass” within our diminished language systems.

⁴⁶ Letter to Mr Young, October 31, 1963; Lewis passed away November 22, 1963.

Chapter 3: The Dilemma of Elusive Mythic Tasting

Story: Human Narrative as a Vessel for Divine Myth

If we are going to embrace the metaphorical richness of language (and avoid the country of the blind), and if we are seeking a glimpse of “tree-delighted Eden,” then Myth is a key component in the solution to our dilemma. The imagination must be embraced alongside the reason; Myth must be united with fact. Myth, however, recedes from view, slipping beyond the realm of words; it is only a partial solution. Some net needs to be cast to hold Myth long enough for the imagination to experience its concreteness. Lewis calls this net *Story*, a model he details in his essay “On Stories”⁴⁷ and in the chapter titled “On Myth” in the book *An Experiment in Criticism*. Before we can approach Lewis’s narrative in *Till We Have Faces*, the concept of *Story* must be examined.

Story, according to Lewis, is a “series of imagined events” (*OTOW* 25), “a form where the means are apparently so often at war with the end” (*OTOW* 44). The “means” is the plot, the events that happen, or in Paul Ricoeur’s terminology, the “episodic dimension” that forms the underlying structure of the text (“Narrative Time” 174). The “end” is what Lewis calls the theme—the “configurational” or “non-chronological” dimension in Ricoeur’s conception of narrative (174).⁴⁸ The connection and tension between these two components are foundational for Lewis’s notion of *Story*. Lewis, however, laments that literary critics rarely examine the story itself, focusing instead on things like character development or on the story as a social critique (*OTOW* 25). In a letter to Dorothy Sayers, Lewis mentions Aristotle and Maud Bodkin as the

⁴⁷ “On Stories” was originally published in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 1947.

⁴⁸ Mara Donaldson makes use of Paul Ricoeur’s theory of narrative to extend Lewis’s theory of story in her discussion of *Till We Have Faces* in the article “Orual’s Story and the Art of Retelling: A Study of *Till We Have Faces*.”

only ones who discuss “the nature of *story*” (*CL II* 655).⁴⁹ In the essay “On Stories,” Lewis again mentions Aristotle, but adds Boccaccio and the “allegorical theory of story” of the Middle Ages, as well as Jung and his theory of archetypes (*OTOW* 25).

Lewis is interested in a specific kind of story, a story where all the elements exist “for the sake of the story itself,” and which is read merely for the “pleasure” of the story (*OTOW* 25, 26). Such a text, however, is not easy to label, and Lewis struggles with terminology. In the essay “On Stories,” he simply calls narratives that give pleasure *Story*; in the chapter “On Myth,” he details his frustration of terms but settles on *myth*. The difficulty arises because we already use the terms *story* and *myth* in many other ways. In “On Myth,” Lewis takes the reader back to the original Greek word, *mythos*, which means simply “story”—an umbrella-like term to cover any sort of tale (true or false), anything with a plot (*EIC* 42). He recognizes that the accumulated ideas about the term *myth* make any such discussion complicated, but Lewis decides there is nothing better for the idea he wishes to present. He qualifies this by adding that of the stories traditionally labeled “myth,” only the best convey the feature he is seeking (*EIC* 42).⁵⁰ He also adds that other stories invented later, “in fully civilized periods,” can have a mythical quality.⁵¹ For the purposes of this paper, the term *Story* will be used to distinguish it from Lewis’s other uses of the word *myth* (like Divine Myth and pagan mythology).

Lewis is searching for a particular kind of story, one with a “very simple narrative shape—a satisfactory and inevitable shape, like a good vase or a tulip,” where a synopsis of the

⁴⁹ Letter written on May 25, 1945. Maud Bodkin’s book, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (1934), is an effort to test the hypothesis of Jung that certain poems contain “a significance going beyond the definite meaning conveyed” through the use of “archetypes” that work below the readers “conscious response” (1).

⁵⁰ Lewis lists “Orpheus, Demeter and Persephone, the Hesperides, Balder, Ragnarok, or Ilmarinen’s forging of the Sampo” as traditional myths that convey the quality he is seeking (*EIC* 42).

⁵¹ The later mythic stories Lewis mentions are *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Robert Louis Stevenson), *The Door in the Wall* (H.G. Wells), *The Castle* (Kafka), the Gormenghast in *Titus Groan* (Mervyn Peake), and the Ents and Lothlorien in *Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien) (*EIC* 42-3).

account is as powerful as the story itself (*EIC* 42). Wright, in her dissertation “The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth,” refers to this as the “simple structural line” found in a mythic text, where “Each object and each event stands out in its own definite shape and entity” (41). What complicates any labeling, however, is Lewis’s admission that this is not only a division of stories; it is also dependent on the degree of receptivity in the reader (*OTOW* 26). The same story may have a mythic effect on one reader and not on another (*EIC* 45-6). Lewis laments in the essay, “On Science Fiction,” that no one, not even Jung, has been able to satisfactorily explain the source of pleasure in *Story* (*OTOW* 94). Lewis commends Jung for his attempt but notes that Jung’s explanation of *Story* is a new myth that “affects us in the same way as the rest” (*OTOW* 94). Lewis is looking for a rational analysis of *Story*, rather than a new myth, metaphor, or imaginative construct. Perhaps it is not possible. In the earlier version of “On Stories,” Lewis calls the key element of *Story* the “kappa element,” the thing that is hidden in the text (Ward 15).⁵² “Kappa” refers to the “initial letter of the Greek word κρυπτόν, meaning ‘hidden’ or ‘cryptic’” (Ward 15).⁵³ In “On Stories,” Lewis notes that the *Story* provides “something else,” an atmosphere or quality that can only be received by the imagination, something that usually resides in myth. In the essay “On Science Fiction,” Lewis does not even begin an analysis, saying, “I shall not attempt to do what Jung failed to do” (*OTOW* 94). The chapter “On Myth,” written later, focuses on the effect and experience of the text, the “part of the iceberg which shows above the surface” and not on a scientific investigation of the parts below (*EIC* 45). Lewis himself seems aware that no foolproof equation can be settled in the mind about the concept of

⁵² The 1947 essay “On Stories” originated from an address called “The Kappa Element in Romance” given in 1940 to the literary society of University College, Oxford (*OTOW* 20). The essay “On Science Fiction” was an address given to the Cambridge University English Club on November 24, 1955 (*OTOW* 21). The chapter “On Myth” follows later in 1961.

⁵³ In one of his early letters to Arthur Greeves, Lewis laments at Arthur’s inability to grasp “the main gist of the story” since every “proper romance” has a “carefully hidden” inner meaning (*TST* 124). This “inner meaning” is the something else, the special quality hidden within a text in Lewis’s later conception of *Story*.

Story, but he is willing to probe the edges and affix rational terms to the parts that can be labeled. For Lewis, *Story* is not a genre, but a quality that may be found in any kind of text. The remainder of this section will outline Lewis's characteristics of *Story*, using the same texts, "On Stories" and "On Myth."

A general requirement of Lewis's *Story* text is the sense of "otherness" produced in the reader. In a letter to Arthur Greeves, Lewis remarks about his desire that a *Story* must have "the hint of another world—one must 'hear the horns of elfland'" (*CL II* 103).⁵⁴ The genres of romance, fairy tale, and science fiction immediately come to mind, but again, Lewis's idea of *Story* cannot be tagged to any one genre. In his poem, "An Expostulation: Against too many writers of science fiction," Lewis laments the lack of otherness in so many texts where it might be expected (*Poems* 58).⁵⁵ It is not enough to just set an earthly story of "Crooks, spies, conspirators, or love" in another galaxy (l.8). Lewis is after a certain atmosphere, wishing to leave earth only if the "Unearthly waits" (l. 14):

Strangeness that moves us more than fear,
Beauty that stabs with tingling spear,
Or Wonder, laying on one's heart
That finger-tip at which we start (l. 15-18).

Lewis ends the poem with a call to the "something else" beyond the text: "As if some thought too swift and shy / For reason's grasp had just gone by" (l. 19-20). Lewis references David Lindsay's story, *Voyage to Arcturus*, as an example—it is not enough to go to another world, the *Story* must move us into "the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit" (*OTOW* 36). Lewis found Lindsay's planet Tormance to be "a region of spirit" (*OTOW* 35). The idea of

⁵⁴ March 25, 1933.

⁵⁵ This poem was originally published in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science*, XVI (June 1959).

“spirit” should immediately remind us of Lewis’s region of mythic or heavenly Reality, that place that is only sensed through the imagination. Edward Uszynski, in his article “C. S. Lewis as Scholar of Metaphor, Narrative, and Myth,” applies this test to Lewis’s own fictional works, arguing that Lewis uses narrative to “create a sense of universal otherness” where the reader “wakes to new dimensions, new plausibilities, and new encounters with experience” (242).

Story also may include elements of the fantastic or the supernatural, which may or may not contribute to the sense of otherness. There is, however, no requirement that the reader must believe in the earthly impossibilities that often are present in these stories (*OTOW* 36, *EIC* 44). Corbin Scott Carnell calls these stories the result of “Arch-nature” invading or approaching “nature” (*Bright* 107). This closeness of the otherworldly then inspires men to produce “tales which have the singular fantastic quality which we associate with myth” (*Bright* 107). Carnell’s term “Arch-nature” means something similar to the term “Reality” used here—the place outside of the frame that accounts for things other than the earthly. Thus, the *Story* produces a mythic experience that can touch the emotions, but is always “grave” and serious in tone (*EIC* 44). Lewis’s ideal *Story* can produce joy in the reader, but it is never comic in nature.⁵⁶

Lewis notes that we never read these types of stories for the characters: the beings in these stories “are shapes moving in another world. We feel indeed that the pattern of their movements has a profound relevance to our own life, but we do not imaginatively transport ourselves into theirs” (*EIC* 44). There is no immediate identification, no sense that they inhabit our realities. Either the characters are part of a greater Reality, or they reside in some parallel existence that we cannot touch. Their world contains its own logic—what Lewis calls the logic of a fairy tale. There are rules and codes that must not be broken, but those same laws would be

⁵⁶ When Lewis uses the term “comic” here, he is not referring to the literary definition of comedy—a text with a resolution. He means, rather, that myth is not humorous in nature.

an absurdity in our own world (*OTOW* 37-8). Lewis gives the example of the fulfilled prophecy theme, the Oedipus-like stories where any steps taken to hinder the end actually lead to its conclusion (*OTOW* 39).⁵⁷

All these elements serve to bypass the intellect. Using the example of Oedipus, Lewis explains how *Story* “does what no theorem can quite do”—the intellect may have great difficulty reconciling fate and free will, but the story of Oedipus allows the mind to enter a place where inconsistencies seem to fit together (*OTOW* 39). Colin Duriez explains this in his work “Myth, Fact and Incarnation”: “A principle that appears contradictory and paradoxical as an abstraction . . . can work satisfactorily, organically and integrally in a narrative” (“Myth” 77). In Uszyski’s words, the “reason is never denied, but it is transcended” within these kinds of narrative (231). While the mind resides in the *Story*, a certain level of natural disbelief must be suspended. In another place, Lewis applies the value of this sidestepping of the intellect to the stories of religion, where a “veil of familiarity” hinders the mind’s receptivity and belief. What if you take ideas “about God or about the sufferings of Christ” and place them “into an imaginary world”? Could a *Story*, he wonders, “steal past those watchful dragons” that the reason posts at the door of the mind (*OTOW* 73)?⁵⁸ The intellect needs a certain degree of surprise in order to disrupt it out of established habits of thought. Stories can communicate something new to the reader, something outside of every thought-pattern that already resides in the reason. The reason will take the new data and will naturally try to “conceptualize—this something”—then new ideas may be permitted entry to the “soul’s acropolis” (*EIC* 45, *Poems* 81, l.1). The intellect’s abstractions will be renewed and broadened, yet will never achieve full mastery over the awe

⁵⁷ Lewis gives the example of Oedipus here, but also *The Man Who Would Be King* (Rudyard Kipling) and *The Hobbit* (J.R.R. Tolkien) (*OTOW* 39).

⁵⁸ This essay, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” was first published in *The New York Times Book Review*, November 18, 1956.

present in the imagination. Eden may be glimpsed, but the whole of the experience is still beyond words.

The persistent theme in Lewis's conception of *Story* is that of a mood, or an atmosphere, that the *Story* as a whole produces. Lewis applies this to the mythopoeic works of George MacDonald: "The meaning, the suggestion, the radiance, is incarnate in the whole story: it is only by chance that you find any detachable merits" (*GMD* 17).⁵⁹ In *Story*, some "quality of the real universe" is imaginatively experienced (*GMD* 21). This experience is not just in the excitement from danger or suspense, not "actual surprises," but the quality of "surprisingness" within the whole text (*OTOW* 41). There is always something more: the characters are not just men; they may be giants or bandits. The silence on the moon is not just danger; it is an experience of the universal "exclusion and desolation" of the human race (*OTOW* 33). Lewis's ideal *Story* allows "the poetry of the basic idea" to seep through the plot (*OTOW* 34), permits the theme to sink deeper into the soul than mere suspense allows, and places a "hushing spell on the imagination" (*OTOW* 28). Lewis repeats this concept in "On Myth," defining *Story* as a narrative that does not rely on the normal methods of suspense to keep the reader focused (*EIC* 43). The text is "more like a thing than a narration," an object that the reader experiences almost tangibly (*EIC* 43). It is this goal that Lewis sought in his allegory, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, hoping for a "touch of mythical life" where the meaning is sensed like a "smell or a taste," where the reader would get to know the text like you would a person or a town (*PR* 12).⁶⁰

The final key characteristic of *Story* is Lewis's opinion that the literary value of the text has little to do with the power of the *Story* itself. Lewis cites Rider Haggard's stories—here the

⁵⁹ Lewis says that the reading of George MacDonald's book *Phantastes* served "to convert, even to baptize . . . my imagination. It did nothing to my intellect nor (at that time) to my conscience" (*GMD* 21).

⁶⁰ Many scholars believe that Lewis did not succeed in obtaining a mythical quality in the allegory *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Schakel says, "Lewis's allegory is far from the best; he is unable to embody his material in images and events sufficiently to make it directly apprehendable by the imagination" (*Reason* 121).

reader is somehow able to “tolerate all faults” in Haggard’s books, simply because something else, something separate from the way the story is presented, keeps the reader in the narrative (*OTOW* 130). It does not matter who writes the tale, or in what form it is presented, these kinds of stories will maintain their power over readers (*EIC* 42). Thus, Lewis identifies two kinds of delight in *Story*: a literary delight in the style of narrative and a delight in the myth itself (*EIC* 46). The myth is extra-literary and is not tied to any specific pattern of words. Narrative, then, is simply a container for the myth; it cannot be the myth itself. Lewis may have chosen the term *myth* to label the kind of stories that have mythic power, but his earlier idea of *Story* is clearer for the purposes of this paper. The *Story* is the whole of the text; the myth is living within it, but not in any one part or in any rational account of the plot. Lewis makes this clear in the preface to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*:

Myth does not essentially exist in *words* at all. We all agree that the story of Balder is a great myth, a thing of inexhaustible value. But whose version—whose *words*—are we thinking when we say this? For my own part, the answer is that I am not thinking of any one’s words . . . What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events, which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all—a mime or silent film. (*GMD* 15)

Lewis continues, comparing myth to its closest literary relative, poetry, where the body of the poem is made of words and the theme “is the soul.” In myth, however, the body is “the imagined events and something inexpressible is the soul” (*GMD* 16). Starr, in his article on meaning in Lewis’s work, calls myth “a kind or mode of languaging” made of images “capable of a richer kind of signification than is language” (169). The myth communicates, but only within and through the whole of the container of the *Story*. Any attempt to remove it and dissect it rationally

will collapse it into allegory and reduce its meaning to a series of abstracted truths. According to Carnell, the myth is something outside the capabilities of descriptive language (*Bright* 106). Like a jar containing perfumed air, the *Story* shapes and conveys the myth—that sweet smell that will dissipate once the jar is opened. The myth cannot be examined outside of the context of *Story*, but it is not defined and limited by the narrative itself.

Story: A Provisional Solution

In this movement outward from the Myth-core of reality to the word-dense region of *Story*, we are still dogged by determined cries of falsity. Lewis continually places Myth side by side with Reality and Eternal Truth, and argues for a Divinity persistent in the use of earthly pagan myths to send mankind truths in whatever form possible. Lewis's conception of myth does not align with the popular myth-as-untruth definition. Now, in this shift to narrative and *Story*, the same popular conception follows us—in a time when “factual realism” is valued, fiction, with its tag of falsehood, is automatically devalued. Fiction is placed with myth in the camp of the imagination and the rational mind is often excluded. The old battleground between the Humanities and the Sciences remains and there seems to be no reconciling of the parties involved. The literary community has responded by attempting to take up the tools of the reason and scientific language and reduce the traditional narrative component of stories. Annie Dillard laments the lack of true storytelling when narration became optional post-WWI, but admits that the appeal to the reason has increased: “essay-like fictions are unlikely to engage deeply our senses or our hearts. But their attraction for the mind may be considerable” (*Living* 47). The reduction, focusing now on the management of words instead of meaning in story (Scott 142-3), is the very thing Lewis feared would come with the dominance of “factual realism.” The rejection of meta-narrative has filtered down into the realm of narrative, often forcing plotlines

into fragmentation, valuing scientific abstraction and a purity of text (Uszynski 232). Fiction and narrative are too vague, too messy, and thus often labeled as false.

Lewis argues that there is nothing new here: the fiction versus fact debate has been raging for centuries—Lewis traces it back to Plato (*EL* 318). The debate is just part of the whole human dilemma that has concerned him from the start. Lewis’s discussion centres on the sixteenth-century literary world in his *Oxford History* volume. “The debate,” he says, “is simply the difficult process by which Europe became conscious of fiction as an activity distinct from history on the one hand and from lying on the other” (*EL* 319). Lewis traces the evolution of Platonic thought, including Francis Bacon, who calls poetry “feigned history” and yet deems poetry essential because humans cannot account for all things based on nature alone (*EL* 320). This summary of the Christianized sixteenth-century Platonic dualism could read as Lewis’s own philosophy: “Nature was not the whole. Above the earth was heaven: behind the phenomenal, the metaphysical. To that higher region the human soul belonged” (*EL* 320-1). Lewis recognizes that a valuing of “feigned history,” what he would later label *Story*, seems like “escapism” to the modern reader (*EL* 320).⁶¹ For the Neoplatonist, however, creating fiction or poetry was not an escape from reality “into a merely subjective refuge” but a “reascending from a world which he had a right to call ‘foolish’ and asserting his divine origin” (*EL* 320). We are still asking the question, wondering if an author/artist has a “right to feign, to ‘make things up’” (*EL* 318)—is the imagination permitted to enter regions the reason has no footprint in? Later in Lewis’s

⁶¹ Lewis addresses the problem of “escapism” in more detail *An Experiment in Criticism*. The term “escapism” is often used against texts considered false or mere fictions. However, “all reading,” says Lewis, “is an escape. It involves a temporary transference of the mind from our actual surroundings to things merely imagined or conceived. This happens when we read history or science no less than when we read fictions. All escape is *from* the same thing; immediate, concrete actuality” (*EIC* 68). What is more important, however, is “what we escape *to*” (*EIC* 68). The suffix “-ism” added on suggests “a confirmed habit of escaping too often . . . or into the wrong things” (*EIC* 69). What Lewis is doing is moving the term away from the texts—those perceived as limited because of their fictional basis—to the readers themselves. Reading as “escape” is not a negative thing, but the reader who gets into a habit of “escapism” may be—“escape is not necessarily joined to escapism” (*EIC* 69).

history, he gives Spenser as an example of a sixteenth-century author at home in Platonic dualism. According to Lewis, Spenser saw the natural and historical world as only a small piece of the “whole story”; Spenser could “tolerate the indignities of time” because of his belief that they would be overshadowed by an eternity that would make the “truths” of this world seem “foolish” (*EL* 393).

The texts that Lewis references in both “On Stories” and “On Myth” are what we would label as fictions—science fiction, courtly romance, fairy tale, and adventure stories. These stories are filled with the imaginary: pre-Space Age voyages, talking animals, unearthly creatures, and unlikely scenarios that instill horror or awe and make readers sharply catch their breath. These are not sanitized, “slice of life” realities that the reason readily accepts. Lewis is fighting for plain narration, the basic plodding plot interwoven with themes that touch on mythic Realities. *Story*, for Lewis, is a way to the “thing itself”—the plot is the linear, time-bound series of events that acts as a “net whereby to catch something else” (*OTOW* 42). The “something else” is what Lewis calls the “theme,” something that has no sequence and is thus outside of time. The theme is more like a state or a quality, what Lewis elsewhere calls the atmosphere or the “thing” hidden (*OTOW* 43). In his reading of *Phantastes*, Lewis found “goodness”—not as a conception of moralism but as “sweet air blowing from ‘the land of righteousness,’” an “elusive Form which if once seen must inevitably be desired with all but sensuous desire—the thing (in Sappho’s phrase) ‘more gold than gold’” (*GMD* 21-22). The task of the plot is to somehow “incarnate what the author is imagining,” to somehow hide within it the “thing” more Real than earthly reality (*OTOW* 43). Lewis calls the “internal tension” between the plot and the theme the story’s “chief resemblance to life”—daily life (like the plot) frustratingly gets in the way of what really matters (the theme) (*OTOW* 44). It is a whole system of mirrors and frames: the *Story* is

contained in our daily life, the plot forms the basic structure of the *Story*, and the theme is submerged someplace within the plot. The *Story* as a whole provides a mythic experience (to varying degrees and differing according to the receptivity of the imagination of each individual reader) through the interaction of the plot and theme and thus allows the reader to experience the “thing itself.” In other words, the *Story* is a play between Ricoeur’s episodic and configurational dimensions within narrative. The *Story*, with its linear narration, provides a means to experience the myth hidden within the text.

The *Story*, at times, is more than just the “net” to catch the “thing”—some stories reach the stature of a concrete object for Lewis. This occurs when “the thing” or the myth behind the *Story* becomes so clear in the imagination, that the whole text begins to personify the “thing itself.” In a letter to Christian Hardie, Lewis explains his own reading habits: “The difference isn’t exactly that I read a novel for the characters. It’s more that for me a novel, or any work of art, is primarily a *Thing*, an Object, enjoyed for its colour, proportions, atmosphere, its flavor—the Odyssey-ishness of the Odyssey or the Learishness of K Lear” (*CL III* 102).⁶² Lewis is reading with his imagination, seeking something hidden within the plot. The more a *Story* can expose and convey the hidden myth, the more it is able to reach “Object” status and does not need to depend on normal narrative methods like suspense and surprise; again, the *Story* becomes “more like a thing than a narration” (*EIC* 43). The reader has a chance to experience the Concrete Reality because the *Story* can “present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience” (*OTOW* 74). While rational fiction may “comment on life,” Lewis prefers his imaginative *Story* that adds something we cannot seem to get through our ordinary day-to-day life (*OTOW* 74). Lewis repeats this idea in another essay, comparing stories to “certain rare dreams” that “enlarge our conception of the range of possible

⁶² March 27, 1951.

experiences” (*OTOW* 93).⁶³ For a receptive reader, these stories embody the “thing itself,” moving the rational mind into new reflections of Reality.

Lewis is not attempting to rationally account for how a *Story* does this, and perhaps that is impossible. The experience of the *Story*, however, is something that Lewis seems unable to live without. In his text “On Science Fiction,” Lewis acknowledges the power of these stories: those that incorporate the “mythopoeic” seem to tap into a “mode of imagination which does something to us at a deep level” (*OTOW* 95). The one who reads and receives says, “I shall never escape this. This will never escape me. These images have struck roots far below the surface of my mind” (*EIC* 48-9). Hart situates “mythopoeia” as the “basis of narrative,” the thing that “charges literature with its vitality” (*Through* 18). All children (and adults too), Lewis insists, should have such an experience. When Lewis is trying to combat improper loves (in this case diseased patriotism) in *The Four Loves*, he suggests that all children can be “strengthened by the image of the past” through stories presented as *Story* (as opposed to legend disguised as textbook fact) (*FL* 28). He continues, “the emphasis should be on the tale as such, on the picture that fires the imagination, the example that strengthens the will” (*FL* 28). The child should get a chance to “feel . . . that he is hearing *saga*” (*FL* 28). The textbook engages the reason, and should be used for systematic historical study, but Lewis feels children should also have their imagination exercised by stories that convey mythic elements.

Yet, Lewis wants to go deeper—not only does he desire an experience of Reality and a chance to reach parts of earthly life that would be impossible without *Story*, but he also is seeking soul and mind transformation. In the “Preface” to George MacDonald’s works, Lewis says that *Story* “hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are re-opened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are

⁶³ “On Science Fiction.”

for most of our lives” (*GMD* 17). Reason can only consider what is already known, what is in the conscious mind. The only way to change our thinking is to gain access to something outside of our minds. John Navone, in the book *Towards a Theology of Story*, quotes from Michael Novak and concludes that “men seldom act according to principles and rules stated in words and logically arranged; they act, rather, according to models, metaphors, stories and myths” (77). *Story* not only rearranges the furniture of our minds but also adds new windows and allows our eyes to see more. Lewis concludes *An Experiment in Criticism* with his foundational reason for reading imaginative literature:

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality . . . in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.” (*EIC* 140-1)

The *Story* allows us to enter other plots and narratives beyond our own limited lives, enlarging our experience of reality/Reality and moving us closer to sight. The *Story*-container is time-bound, and thus parallels our own lives. The temporal plot allows us a chance to experience the mythic, unwordable Reality that we could not otherwise touch, giving a brief space of unity between the reason and the imagination.

The *Story* ends, however, and the book is put away. The reader must return again and again to *Story* because the wound-gash between our faculties still bleeds. Lewis does not guarantee perfection; the solution is only provisional. Thus, we are still haunted by a desire for more of something we cannot quite understand. Lewis’s *Story* plot is the “imperfect . . . net of time and event” used “for catching what is not really a process at all” (*OTOW* 45). We turn to

Story because our own life is restricted to tensed events, seemingly lacking a theme, separated from any sort of mythic Reality. In the *Story* we catch glimpses of grander themes and find a release “from the stranglehold of temporality” (Uszynski 244). This is what Lewis refers to at the end of the essay “On Stories”:

In life and art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive. Whether in real life there is any doctor who can teach us how to do it, so that at last either the meshes will become fine enough hold the bird, or we be so changed that we can throw our nets away and follow the bird to its own country, is not a question for this essay. But I think it is sometimes done—or very, very, nearly done—in stories. (*OTOW* 45)

Lewis believes that a tensed life can never wholly possess the Myth beyond; the “internal tension in the heart of every story” resembles our own lives (*OTOW* 44). We are outside Eden and unable to see heaven. The myth is never quite “embodied” in the relentless moving of the plot. The idea fades, and the bird flies away. This is always the case, unless, of course, some sort of transformation occurred through the reading of the *Story*. What if the *Story* re-shaped the reader’s mind to such a degree that a closer unity between reason and imagination remains once the book is closed?

According to Lewis, it happened once—the unworded Myth Reality entered our worded reality and became “embodied” in the plot of history. The *Story* of the Gospels remains; it speaks of the Incarnated Word, and whispers a strange tale of a dying and resurrecting god that the tellers actually believed was real. For the writers and tellers of the Gospel *Story*, the Myth equaled Fact—the Athene and Demeter divisions in the mind had been resolved into belief, and imagination and reason now could speak the same. Some view the story as human myth and not

Eternal Fact; others are quite ready to assign Christ to a historical position but to disregard Divine Myth. However, Lewis wants a complete unity of Myth and Fact. William C. Johnson, in a discussion of imagination and Lewis, states: “Perhaps myth became history in Christ, but history—the phase of rational-material consciousness—must again become myth, through *willed* imagination of the incarnate *word*” (“Lewis” 39).

Chapter 4: *Till We Have Faces*

Textual Metamorphosis: Pagan Myth Retold as Story

The textual source for Lewis's novel *Till We Have Faces* is found in Apuleius's work, the *Metamorphoses*, also titled *The Golden Ass*.⁶⁴ The Cupid and Psyche story is one of several tales inserted into the frame story of Lucius, Apuleius's wandering hero. Lucius, propelled forwards by Fortune, goes through a series of sufferings and transformations (hence the title), and along the way has many tales to tell. The traditional view of inset tales, the "story within a story" motif, was used to "illuminate the larger whole," and many scholars have situated the Cupid and Psyche story as the key for understanding Lucius's journey (Kenney 12). The opening of the *Metamorphoses* argues that the story is for entertainment only, but many have read it for deeper meanings, looking for hidden ideas in the text. In particular, the story of Cupid and Psyche is often read allegorically.⁶⁵ Others call it a myth (in the sense of general pagan mythology in Lewis's terms), or a literary fable (Edwards 67). Peter Schakel notes that Apuleius's tale lacks "imaginative and numinous qualities"; it is not filled with Lewis's ideal mythic *Story*, but with "folk motifs and archetypes" (*Reason* 61). Lewis himself calls the *Metamorphoses* a fantasy in *An Experiment in Criticism* (50) and labels Apuleius's story of Cupid and Psyche an earthly "myth" in a letter (*CL III* 633).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The title *Metamorphoses* was found on a manuscript; the title *The Golden Ass* comes from a comment of Augustine: *Apuleius in libris, quos asini aurei titulo inscripsit* (*Civ. Dei* 18.18) (Kenney 2).

⁶⁵ The seeming simplicity of Apuleius's text encourages this type of reading, as does the names of minor characters within the text: "Habit" (VI.8.5), "Care," and "Sorrow" (VI.9.2) are all part of Venus's household; Cupid is called "Love" at times; and the baby born of Cupid and Psyche is called "Pleasure" (VI.24.4).

⁶⁶ Letter to Christian Hardie on July 31, 1955.

Lewis first read the Cupid and Psyche tale as a young man, and later began several attempts at poetic retellings.⁶⁷ In 1923, he wrote in his diary, “My head was very full of my old idea of a poem on my own version of the Cupid and Psyche story” (*AMR* 266). In 1955, he wrote to Christian Hardie: “the idea of re-writing the old myth . . . has been in my mind ever since I was an undergraduate . . . I’ve been at work on Orual for 35 years” (*CL III* 633). In a note after the text of *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis calls Apuleius his “source” rather than an “influence” or “model” (313).⁶⁸ From the start, Lewis “felt quite free to go behind Apuleius,” and alters the story by making “Psyche’s palace invisible to normal, mortal eyes” (*TWHF* 313). This alteration, as well as Lewis’s choice of the elder sister Orual as the main narrator, is consistent throughout the whole evolution of Lewis’s tale (*CL III* 633). What did change, however, was the relationship between Orual and the supernatural beings in the story: “in my pre-Christian days she was to be in the right and the gods in the wrong” (*CL III* 633). Lewis outlines the final version in another letter: “Divine Love gradually conquers, first, a Pagan (and almost savage) soul’s misconceptions of the Divine (as Ungit), then shallow ‘enlightenment’ (the Fox), and, most of all, her *jealousy* of the real God, whom she hates till near the end because she wants Psyche to be entirely hers” (*CL III* 1419).⁶⁹ In Lewis’s text, we see very little of Psyche—especially of her grief and wanderings (which differs from Apuleius’s version)—and much more of Orual, the jealous sister contending with the gods. In a discussion with his publisher, Lewis calls his text a “re-interpretation” since he changes “the accepted motivation” of the old tale (*CL III* 779).⁷⁰

Despite the obvious change—the choice to focus on Orual’s battle with the gods—the presence

⁶⁷ Lewis’s first mention of the story shows up in a letter to Arthur Greeves, January 28, 1917 (*TST* 158). Peter Schakel’s chapter on *Till We Have Faces* in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* has a detailed outline of the genesis of Lewis’s version of the story (281-3).

⁶⁸ For further reading on the difference between a “source” and an “influence,” see Lewis’s essay “The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version” found in *Selected Literary Essays* (133-134).

⁶⁹ Letter to Patricia Mackey, March 26, 1963.

⁷⁰ Letter to John H. McCallum, August 11, 1956.

of the gods is distant in the text itself, the whole realm of the gods recedes and rarely intrudes into the narrative. The “certainty of supernatural causality,” present in Apuleius’s version is removed in Lewis’s story—all the conniving and jealousy of Venus and the communication among the gods is removed or hidden (Manlove, *Literary* 194). Lewis moves the text out of earthly mythology and into the daily realities of human life.⁷¹ Orual struggles with the hiddenness of the gods; she disbelieves them, stands in judgment over them, and generally lives life separate from Divine presence. Lewis is toying with our accepted ideas about mythological texts—re-inventing the old myth into something different.⁷²

At this point, we will take a diversion into the reception of *Till We Have Faces* and its general classification by scholars, before any attempt to examine the text itself. The subtitle of *Till We Have Faces*, “A Myth Retold,” has immediately focused attention on the book as “myth”—although some early reviewers of the book labeled it as “allegory.” Marjorie Wright, in keeping with her dissertation topic, calls the text a “myth” with “psychological and religious depths,” while still admitting that it seems allegorical at times (55, 56). Lewis’s friend, Owen Barfield, notes that it is more myth than allegory (*Light* xx-xxi). Some, like Michael Christensen, call it “myth” but maintain that parts of it are still allegorical (*Scripture* 61). Others, like R. J. Reilly, are more definite, insisting that a “myth retold remains a myth, not an allegory” (*Romantic* 125). Albert Reddy and Sharon Jebb also classify the text as myth (Reddy 153, Jebb 113). Clyde S. Kilby, connecting with the mythic-religious tale of the priest in Essur at the end of

⁷¹ A listing of differences between the texts of Apuleius and Lewis has been detailed elsewhere, see especially Mara Donaldson’s list in her book *Holy Places are Dark Places: C. S. Lewis and Paul Ricoeur on Narrative Transformation* (10-11). Joe R. Christopher compares the ordering of the events between the two versions in his article “The Labors of Psyche: A Sorting of Events,” found in *The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* from 1975.

⁷² This paper will not detail the plot of *Till We Have Faces* as many earlier articles and books have done. Because the book was not as widely received and read as Lewis’s other fictional works, plot summaries were often deemed necessary before any discussion of themes and textual form could be done. For example, Clyde S. Kilby’s writings on *Till We Have Faces* contain extensive plot outlines.

Part I, calls the story “a myth within a myth” (*Christian* 63). Another dissertation, written by Rosemary Wright, calls it a “re-written pagan myth” (5), a text that fits Lewis’s conception of earthly mythology and which functions as a *praeparatio evangelica* for a pagan audience (“Biblical” 15-16). Corbin Scott Carnell calls it “the most complex and perhaps the most beautiful myth Lewis has ever done” (*Bright* 115). In another place, Carnell calls it a “pre-realist mythic narrative,” acknowledging that there is much realistic detail present, but still insisting that Lewis is “weaving a myth, not writing a realistic novel” (“Novelist” 3).

Others posit that Lewis is attempting to reconstruct an original mythic version that could, as it were, go behind and become the source for Apuleius. Reilly, who calls the text “myth,” sees Lewis as “recreat[ing] the ancient consciousness which saw a part of reality in terms of myth” (118). Dean Loganbill goes into this at length, concluding that *Till We Have Faces* is “a work of imagination to reconstruct the primitive mythopoeic consciousness,” and a means “to discover the true myth behind” Apuleius’s redaction (“Myth” 56). As such, he believes the modern reader is out of place and will have difficulty receiving such a text (“Myth” 57). Reddy notes that Lewis is trying to find the original “outlines and significance” of the myth which has been “distorted and obscured in its transmission” (“TWHF” 161-2). Another perspective focuses on the text as the Christianizing of a pagan myth. Evan Gibson calls *Till We Have Faces* “a Christian treatment of pre-Christian material” (*C.S. Lewis* 16). Reilly also includes the idea of the “end of paganism” within his analysis and considers the story “a preamble to Lewis’s mythical version of Christianity” (*Romantic* 116-7). This is similar to Edward Zogby’s description of *Till We Have Faces* as “the last chapter of pagan myth before the Incarnation” (“Triadic” 34). Finally, Mineko Honda calls the text a “meticulous retold version of the Christian myth” (*Imaginative* 139).⁷³

⁷³ Some scholars have limited the text of *Till We Have Faces* by trying to force it into a strict Christian interpretation. Biblical allusions do abound (see the dissertation of Rosemary Wright), and Lewis was certainly

Using the term “myth,” however, is problematic unless we place it within Lewis’s own conception of earthly mythology and Divine Myth.

The scholars, however, who align most closely with the position of this paper, categorize *Till We Have Faces* as a modern realistic novel. Joe R. Christopher positions the book as the best example of Lewis’s romance writing, a text that “subordinates its archetypal patterns to a semi-historic setting and a biographical plot” (“Romances” 326). John Lawlor, with his qualification of his label of “myth” according to Lewis’s use in *An Experiment in Criticism*, fits with the argument here (“Tutor” 81). Stella Gibbons classifies the text as a “Homeric or Icelandic saga” with “a Jamesian subtlety of psychology” (“Imaginative” 94). Rebecca Radmacher calls it a modernist text, a book attempting to explore “truth that was too complex and ‘unsayable’ to be embodied in previous forms” of the novel genre (“Nothing” 6). Reddy modifies his earlier statement, noting that Orual can move outside of the myth and tell her story, making the text “both a novel and a myth” (“TWHF” 161-2). According to Curtis Gruenler, Lewis uses the “frame of a realistic novel,” to contain “both myth and fairy tale” (“C.S. Lewis” 259). Honda cites the psychological depth and the complexity of good and evil as two factors that bring the label of “novel” closer to the *Till We Have Faces* text (*Imaginative* 109). Doreen Wood agrees, calling it a “realistic novel” and “a kind of historical novel” with mythic themes (“Pattern” 35, 1). Doris Myers, in her book *Bareface*, uses the novel classification of *Till We Have Faces* as a theme in her discussion of the story. Myers considers it a “realistic modern novel” (3-4) that removes the Cupid and Psyche myth from the “realm of fantasy” and places it into “history” (*Bareface* 51). Schakel argues that the setting of Glome is not vague enough to fit with the universal character of traditional myths, and agrees with Doris Myers’s novelistic focus

informed by Christian thought and belief, but the text deserves a treatment based on narrative and literary theory as well. Doris Myers insists that if the book is “read without archetypal or Christian pre-conceptions, the book emerges as a stylistic tour de force” (*In Context* xiii).

(Cambridge 283). Finally, Mark Freshwater's comment extends the issue of classification into our reason/imagination conflict: "Rather than attempting to analyze the human personality through reason, Lewis attempted to portray its innermost workings through myth, making myth come alive through fictional narrative" (C.S. Lewis 2). Applying the terms of "realism" and "novelistic" to Lewis's reading of the Cupid and Psyche story therefore places *Till We Have Faces* in a different category than that of traditional understandings of "myth" and "allegory."

In a discussion like this, we must not lose sight of Lewis's own opinions. Although Lewis readily admits that an author cannot know everything about his own work, since this paper attempts to follow Lewis's concepts of myth and reality, we must also consider his own reflections on *Till We Have Faces*. From the start, Lewis felt his book was misunderstood. Repeatedly in his letters, he comments on the poor reception of the book and the lack of the understanding shown in reviews. In a letter dated September 23, 1956 (a few months after the publishing of the book), Lewis says that he has received "no reviews yet that show much understanding" of the text (CL III 790).⁷⁴ Although Lewis considered it his "best book," according to the "critics and the public" it appeared to be a "failure" and a "flop" (CL III 1148).⁷⁵ In this letter he concludes, "No one seems to have the slightest idea what I'm getting at in it." A year before this letter, in 1959, Lewis needed to correct Peter Milward's conception of the book: "It isn't an allegory, I was trying to tell a story" (CL III 1090).⁷⁶ In a letter to Clyde S. Kilby, Lewis describes it as "a work of (supposed) historical imagination" (CL III 830).⁷⁷ Lewis continues, describing what he had in mind and emphasizing his lack of allegorical intention:

⁷⁴ Letter to Roger Lancelyn Green.

⁷⁵ Letter to Audrey Sutherland on April 28, 1960.

⁷⁶ September 24, 1959.

⁷⁷ February 10, 1957.

[*Till We Have Faces* is] a guess of what it might have been like in a little barbarous state on the borders of the Hellenistic world of Greek culture, just beginning to affect it . . .

Much that you take as allegory was intended solely as realistic detail. The Wagon men are Nomads from the steppes. The children made mud pies not for symbolic purposes but because children do. The Pillar Room is simply a room. (*CL III* 830)

Note Lewis's mention of "realistic detail"—here we must turn to Lewis's use of fictional realism in *Till We Have Faces*.

Lewis outlines his theory of realism in fiction in the chapter "On Realisms" in *An Experiment in Criticism*. The plurality of the title refers to two kinds of realism—"realism of presentation" and "realism of content." Lewis defines realism of presentation as "the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail (*EIC* 57).⁷⁸ Lewis calls it a sense of "weather" or "countryside" that surrounds or provides a backdrop for the action of the text (*EIC* 58). Lewis personally found stories that lacked this backdrop unappealing. He says of *The Three Musketeers*, that though there is much excitement in the story, there is a "total lack of atmosphere . . . There is no country in the book—save as a storehouse of inns and ambushes. There is no weather. When they cross to London there is no feeling that London differs from Paris" (*OTOW* 29). Lewis finds that this type of realism often occurs in texts that are not "'realistic' in the sense of being probable or even possible" (*EIC* 59). It is found in medieval romance, for example, or in fantastic fiction—a realism present in texts that would be labeled "escapism literature" now (*EIC* 60). The reader's attention, in these stories, "is fixed on something concrete and individual; on the more than ordinary terror, splendor, wonder, pity, or absurdity of a particular case" (*EIC* 65). Receptive

⁷⁸ Lewis mentions many examples of presentation realism: Chaucer's friar driving the cat off the bench, the "exact specifications of size which are given by direct measurements in *Gulliver*," and the dragon "sniffing along the stone" in *Beowulf* (*EIC* 57).

readers of this kind of realism do not seek to illuminate their own life but pursue the enjoyment of the story for its own sake—the story exists so that they “shall weep, or shudder, or wonder, or laugh” as they read (*EIC* 66). The plot of these stories is often based on “hypothetical probability” (*EIC* 65). If the initial event happened (and this is always based on some authority, ancient or not), then the rest of the plot would follow. The reader/listener accepts the initial event, however improbable in and of itself, and then sits down to enjoy the story. Stories that contain realism of presentation may also fit Lewis’s *Story* container for myth, presented earlier in the text of *An Experiment in Criticism*—a *Story* that may contain fantastic elements outside of the ordinary life of the reader.

Lewis considers the second type, realism of content, the dominant, and at times exclusive type of realism used in the modern world. Readers of these stories need not suspend belief, the plots are “probable or ‘true to life’” (*EIC* 59), and they are “the sort of thing that happens” to anyone (*EIC* 61). Here “there is much to be felt and much to be analysed,” much to engage the reason, in other words, but “there is nothing to be seen or heard or tasted or touched” (*EIC* 59). This should remind us of Annie Dillard’s lament in *Living by Fiction* about “purified” literature post-WWI. Lewis says it shows up in French tragedy and sometimes in ancient Greek tragedy, but the majority of these texts is more recent and follows the example of *Middlemarch* and *Vanity Fair* (*EIC* 61-2). Lewis calls this a new trend, and believes that the general pattern throughout literary history is not content realism but an author or teller saying, “Listen, I have something out of the ordinary to tell you.” A story with realistic content outlines what could and has happened to everyone, it contains plot lines that follow everyday realities, and there is little surprise for the reader. Often, these stories are called “comments on” or “slices of life” (*EIC* 60). This type of literature strives to be factual, almost scientific: a hard edge of truth pruned of all

messy ornamentation. Lewis does not believe that this type of writing is inferior, but warns that the “dominant taste at present demands realism of content” and worries that any other type will be reneged as improper and thus devalued (*EIC* 60).⁷⁹

Lewis’s dilemma in the mind still applies—Lewis does not want us to forget about the stories that require the use of the imagination, narratives that act as a container for myth. Stories that show a realism of presentation even amid improbable situations or fairy tale-like realities allow the mind to exercise both rational and imaginative faculties. This is Lewis’s provisional solution at work in *Story. Till We Have Faces*, which Lewis considered his best work, puts into practice his theory of the realisms in fiction in order to produce a *Story* that engages the whole person. *Till We Have Faces*, with the visionary and otherworldly elements (especially in Part II), also presents a carefully detailed world filled with realistic features—this fictional text is another example of Lewis’s realism of presentation. In a letter to Phoebe Hesketh, before the writing of *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis asks: “Don’t you think that the more infinite the theme, the harder, tighter, severer the poem ought to be?” (*CL III* 459-60).⁸⁰ This is what Lewis has done with *Till We Have Faces*—produced a text with the hard edges of realism that nevertheless deals with “Eternity and infinity” (*CL III* 460).

Apuleius’s Cupid and Psyche story has little realism, beginning in the universal nature of traditional story telling form: “There were in a certain city a king and queen, who had three beautiful daughters” (IV.28.1). Psyche is the only human character that is named in the text, her parents are simply the “king and queen,” and her elder sisters are called “sisters” or at times, “the two wicked women” (V.11.1). The abundance of names in the story belongs to the gods—Venus,

⁷⁹ Lewis notes four possibilities here: literature with realism “of presentation without that of content, as in medieval romance; or that of content without that of presentation, as in French (and some Greek tragedy); or both together, as in *War and Peace*; or neither, as in the *Furioso* or *Rasselas* or *Candide*” (*EIC* 59-60).

⁸⁰ April 21, 1954.

Zephyr, Jove, Ceres, Juno, and Apollo. The only place names are those in connection to the gods: the shrines of Venus at “Paphos, Cnidos,” and “Cythera” (IV.29.3), the “oracle of Apollo at Miletus” (IV.32.5), and the entrance to the Underworld near “Sparta, a famous city of Greece” (VI.18.1). The vagueness of place and person, evident from the very first line, signals a connection to the human system of mythology. There is a remoteness about the story, a kind of haziness that renders it easily repeatable; the type of story mothers repeat from memory at bedtime, or the tales old men tell around the fire. In fact, the context of this tale is Lucius retelling what he overhears a drunken old woman telling a young prisoner (Kenney 13). The myth opens with the crucial problem of the youngest sister’s divine beauty, and the subsequent jealousy of Venus. In her anger, Venus snaps, “I must share with a mortal girl the honour due to my godhead, and my name, established in heaven, is profaned by earthly dirt!” (IV.30.1). Apuleius’s tale is filled with scheming, angry gods who frequently speak with mortals and with each other. Cupid’s nighttime conversations with Psyche are recorded (V.5, 6, 11, 12), as are Psyche’s conversations with other gods, like Ceres (VI.2, 3) and Juno (VI.4), as well as the many direct interactions she has with Venus. The world of the gods is open both to the characters within the story and to the reader outside the text—there are no invisible palaces, and the gods can be met and communed with directly at their shrines. Lewis’s desire for “otherness” in *Story* rarely enters into Apuleius’s tale.

Realistic detail, however, is not completely lacking in Lewis’s source. For example, one of the elder sisters must care for a rheumatic-ridden husband, forced to “massage his twisted, stone-hard, fingers, spoiling” her hands “with stinking compresses and filthy bandages and loathsome plasters” (V.10.2). In other places, however, when we might expect more detail, the text is vague. Apuleius tells us that the sisters are given “rich eatables and savoury delicacies,”

but there is no further detail about the food (V.15.2). When the sisters find Psyche in her palace, nothing is said about her appearance (V.7); only later do they comment in their jealousy, “She looks in the air and gives off an aura of goddess already” (V.9.7). Lewis, however, describes Psyche’s appearance carefully—Psyche does not just give off the “aura of goddess” but looks “brightface,” she is tanned and in rags, but has “eyes like two stars” and “smooth and rounded” limbs (*TWHF* 102). Apuleius’s tale has little concern for an exactness of time. Where Apuleius states that the sisters “hurriedly made their way” to the rock to find Psyche, Lewis has a whole paragraph where Orual carefully plans her trip (*TWHF* 89).⁸¹ Fantastic elements are also included in Lewis’s source tale. Apuleius puts instructions for Psyche not only in the mouth of gods like Pan (V.25), but also in inanimate objects: the reed tells her how to obtain the golden wool safety (VI.12), and the tower dissuades her from suicide and explains how to get to the entrance to the Underworld (VI.17-18). Thus, Lewis is working with a source that contains brief moments of realistic detail (realism of presentation) and little realism of content. The tale is similar to many others found in pagan mythology—a focus on the supernatural world of the gods, removed from any specific locality, mixed with elements of fantasy and containing brief moments of realistic description.

Lewis’s story, especially Part I, has little connection with the narrative style of stories in pagan mythology. He transforms the text to produce a modern story, containing much realism of presentation (in both parts of the book), combined with realism of content (especially in Part I of the book). The gods figure largely in Orual’s anger and complaints, but they themselves intrude comparatively little into the narrative—they are remote, otherworldly, and the source of the sense of “otherness” that Lewis requires. The gods carry the elements of Divine Myth into the narrative. Apuleius’s tale is now metamorphosed into a realistic narrative that allows Divine

⁸¹ Doris Myers also cites this example (*Bareface* 51).

Myth to hover behind, troubling both Orual and the readers who sense its presence. We shall now turn to a more detailed examination to discover what Lewis is doing with the text of the Cupid and Psyche story.

Till We Have Faces: Realisms

Lewis's opening paragraph of *Till We Have Faces* introduces the voice of Orual, the elder sister narrator, and also sets the tone for the book:

I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of gods. I have no husband nor child, nor hardly a friend, through whom they can hurt me. My body, this lean carrion that still has to be washed and fed and have clothes hung about it daily with so many changes, they may kill as soon as they please. The succession is provided for. My crown passes to my nephew. (*TWHF* 3)

The words are short; the phrases direct and straightforward.⁸² The basic facts are presented: age, lack of relations, lack of fear, and royal position (indicated by the words “succession” and “crown”). The descriptive phrase, “lean carrion,” injects a rawness and hardness into the long adjectival phrase about her body. She considers herself dead already and not worth the effort to kill. Lewis is moving the text from the vagueness of the “Once upon a time” style found in Apuleius to an exacting first person account of a woman close to death. The narrative is immediately intentional, the words of an individual pleading her case: “I will accuse the gods,” Orual says, “especially the god who lives on the Grey Mountain” (*TWHF* 3). Unlike the tale in Apuleius, this god is not named. She continues, “I will tell all he has done to me from the beginning, as if I were making my complaint of him before a judge” (*TWHF* 3). This is to be a

⁸² Myers calls Orual's language “gritty and harsh,” but argues that her sentences are carefully crafted with rhetorical figures like amplification, isocolon, parallelism, and antithesis (*In Context* 202). Lewis gives his narrator a careful mixture of barbarian simplicity of language combined with Greek oratory influences.

legal case, and the language will follow suit—throughout the book, Lewis continues the preciseness of language that opens the text. Orual specifies which language she is using (“Greek”), she has a purpose for her document (the Greek people speak freely about the gods and perhaps they will have an answer for her accusation), she makes comments about her text (the names of people and places will be in the language of her people), and she has a definite beginning point for her account (“I will begin my writing with the day my mother died and they cut off my hair”) (*TWHF* 3-4). She names herself at the beginning of the third paragraph: “I was Orual” (*TWHF* 4). The shift to past tense here sharply differs from the tense of the opening line—“I am old now.” Her name belongs to the past. This shifting of tenses occurs throughout the narrative; Orual may be attempting to record a pure, historical account of her life, but her present ideas about the gods and concerns for accuracy constantly intrude. For instance, right at the time when she realizes that she cannot see Psyche’s palace, she interrupts her narrative: “And now we are coming to that part of my history on which my charge against the gods chiefly rests; and therefore I must try at any cost to write what is wholly true” (*TWHF* 117). Orual wishes to have as scientific and rational an account as possible, and this she mostly accomplishes—the text itself displays the hard realism of her life. Her intent is clear, she wishes to “set down the truth” and do what she believes no one else has ever done before—accuse the gods (*TWHF* 245).

Orual’s scientific language is evident immediately in her description of the location of Glome: directional words are used (“south-east,” “east,” “north”), distances are measured (the city is back from the river the distance “a woman can walk in the third of an hour”), and the city is placed in relation to other cities (“not more than a day’s journey above Ringal”) (*TWHF* 4). Glome is located on one side of a river called the “Shennit”; the religious house of Ungit is on the other side. The city is some distance from Greece, but close enough to be influenced by it—

she notes that traders come from the Greeklands three times a year (*TWHF* 6). On her trip up the mountain, she comments on the gleam of the sea she sees, but is careful to specify, “it is not to be compared with the Great Sea of the Greeks” (*TWHF* 95). Many scholars have commented on the placement of the story in a realistic, earthly setting. James Como considers the fact that Glome “is not another world and does not exist in another dimension” and places the city “on Earth (in Thrace, or near the Caucasus)” (“Preface” 3). Doris Myers argues that *Till We Have Faces* is “realistic fiction” because Glome is portrayed as if it were a real, historical place (*Bareface* 4).⁸³

An attempt at historical veracity also forces Orual to be time conscious. Time is associated with specific events: “That year after I fought Redival was the first of the bad harvests” (*TWHF* 26) and “They burnt the dead Queen on the third day” (*TWHF* 20). The closer Orual gets to the main accusation, the more precise her text gets. After Psyche gets called “The Accursed!” on the streets, Orual notes that “ruin” did not fall “the next day,” things only worsened slowly over a “whole train of days” (*TWHF* 40). When Orual is waiting in dread for Psyche to return from the streets, watching “the shadows of the pillars slowly changing their position” she shows an active mind, attentive to the passing of time (*TWHF* 38). When the priest arrives in the palace with the fatal message, Orual reports that he comes seven days after his recovery from the fever (*TWHF* 42). After the sacrifice, Orual decides to gather the remains of her sister, but realizes that haste is needed—the first snow comes in “about five and twenty days” (*TWHF* 87). As noted earlier, she plans her trip meticulously. It will take her eight hours to reach the Tree (since she is a woman and unused to the rough terrain) and she will need two hours for

⁸³ Myers has a more detailed section on the historical period and the possible location of Glome in her book *C. S. Lewis In Context*. Based on details in the text concerning the Fox (his philosophy for instance) she places his capture between 310 and 280 B.C.E. Glome may have been located in the Balkans, close to the Danube, or in the Caucasus Mountains (193-5).

her work there and at least six hours to return home—so she decides to spend the night on the mountain (*TWHF* 89). The second time Orual goes to the mountain, she leaves in secret while the King is gone hunting. Orual then writes that he returns from the hunt seven days after her own arrival back to the palace, enough time for her stabbed arm to heal (*TWHF* 181). Stephen Medcalf declares this text of Lewis’s “more translucent to the passing of time” than his other fictional works, with “immediate” language presenting “concrete objects more abruptly” (“Making” 134-5).⁸⁴

The text is not only time and place specific, but also focuses on commonplace realities. The detailing of the concrete gives the “impression of scientific, objective reality” that Orual so badly needs to authenticate her tale (Myers, *Bareface* 117). Orual is concerned about careful description in her remembering. As a girl, she remembers the “coolness” of her head after the haircut, and the “hot sun” on her neck while making mud houses (*TWHF* 5). The arrival of the new Queen is connected in her memory with a “bitter frost” and their play as children sliding on the ice that spread “from the byre-door to the big dunghill, what with frozen spills of milk and puddles and the stale of beasts” (*TWHF* 6). She is particularity sensitive to smells: “the whole courtyard reeked with the skins” of slaughtered beasts before the wedding (*TWHF* 10), she dislikes the holy smell in the house of Ungit, and later says of the temple “There was as much taint of sweat and foul air as (in a mortal’s house) would have set the laziest slut to opening windows, scouring and sweeping” (*TWHF* 269). Further, she remembers the small, “shivering, white body with its staring eyes” of her new stepmother that they undressed and left in the King’s bed (*TWHF* 12). The sight of the temple girls is also strange to her, “their gilt paps and their huge flaxen wigs and their faces painted till they looked like wooden masks (*TWHF* 42).

⁸⁴ Myers notes that Orual “measures time in hours, which can be judged by the movement of the sun, but has no names for smaller units” (*In Context* 196). Smaller, sudden time lapses are measured in heartbeats (*TWHF* 78, 171).

Other sights are lodged in her memory: a “fat fly” sluggishly “crawling up the doorpost” (*TWHF* 90), on the journey to the Mountain she must cross a “cursed black valley” of “dark moss, dark peat-bogs, shingle, great boulders, and screes” spilling from the Mountain like bleeding “sores” (*TWHF* 97), baby Psyche sleeping with the “tiny” “sound of her breathing” (*TWHF* 21), and while travelling in Essur, she notes how “the sunlight on the stubble looked aged and gentle,” and sees the “squares of standing corn diminishing” as the reapers sing in their “sweat and sunburn and merriment” (*TWHF* 239, 238). Sounds follow her as well—when her father kills the servant boy the night of the Queen’s death, Orual remembers: “the fall of his body sent the flagon rolling over and over. It made a great noise in that silence; I hadn’t thought till then that the floor of the hall was so uneven” (*TWHF* 15). On her trip up the mountain, Orual notes the heavy silence, “a lark singing; but for that, huge and ancient stillness” (*TWHF* 95). Lewis is building an account of careful detail and realistic presentation, showing his narrator Orual as a careful observer.

Realism of content enters in as well. The plotline moves as one might expect if Glome is a real place in that time of history. Historical details are accurate, and what we might anticipate—nations trade slaves taken from the wars, kings marry for political alliance, fevers decimate populations already weakened by famine, and the divide between the common people and those of royal blood has its advantages and disadvantages for both sides. Women in Glome die in childbirth, and if they survive, they “splay out” and lose their figures (*TWHF* 13, 232). Palace intrigue is a problem in Glome, and Orual, once Queen, cleans up the palace, hanging tale-tellers like old Batta, and rewarding the good servants. Further, the king is rightly disturbed when he discovers that the priest has held a secret meeting with the people—normally all

assemblies are called only by the King—and this is political decorum that we would expect for this time in history (*TWHF* 44).

In this text, Lewis often places realism of presentation and of content adjacent to each other. For instance, Orual, as a girl, leans on her windowsill to dry her hair (presentation), and then overhears the King voice his dissatisfaction with the political marriage alliance he has made (content) (*TWHF* 13). Also, while the people are harassed by the burden of the famine and fevers, they seek a solution in any way they can, including the demand that beautiful, goddess-like Psyche come and heal them (content), so Psyche goes out of the cool, palace darkness “into the hot, pestilential glare of that day” (presentation) (*TWHF* 27). All, the people of royal blood along with the commoners, are lacking in food from the famine (content), and Orual notes that in the palace all they have is “leeks and bean-bread and small beer” (presentation).

Lest we mistakenly think that Lewis confines his realism to Part I alone, a few examples from the visionary Part II should be mentioned. Even amid her dreams, Orual continues with her vivid account of detail. In the vision of the golden-fleeced rams, Orual takes time to record the setting: “There was deep, blue sky above them, and the grass was a luminous green like emerald, and there was a pool of very dark shadow, clear-edged, under every tree. The air of that country was sweet as music” (*TWHF* 283). Orual knows that she is nearing death (she describes her body with her “hanging dugs and shriveled flanks”), yet she is still much aware of things in the palace—the others do not realize that she knows that a message has been sent to her successor, her nephew Daaran (*TWHF* 258, 253). She describes meeting the eunuch Tarin, a fat man “all shining and reeking with oil, and tricked out with as much doll-finery as one of Ungit’s girls” (*TWHF* 254). Then, in her meeting with Bardia’s widow Ansit, there is a brief moment of softness and understanding between them that Orual compares to the moment of laughter on a

battlefield when “a sudden gust of wind” whips cloaks and the killing is paused for a moment (*TWHF* 263). Even as she sorts through things that her reason can barely hold, Orual maintains her rational description, her attention to detail, and her focus on the concrete. Realism of presentation continues even amid the fantastic and otherworldly dreams and visions. Orual’s outer life grows less a focus (what made up the realism of content in Part I) and her inner world begins to awaken, forcing a dormant imagination to attempt the grasp of the unearthly Realities being thrust upon her.

However, the novel’s realism is not seamless—and the breaks in realism reveal the inadequacy of any attempt at solely rationalistic account. Orual strives for a logical, tight case against the gods, but she finds that her memory is at times inadequate and she is unable to know all things equally well. Orual laments at the beginning of Part II, “Memory, once waked, will play the tyrant.” She goes on, identifying how difficult the task turned out to be:

I found I must set down (for I was speaking as before judges and must not lie) passions and thoughts of my own which I had clean forgotten. The past which I wrote down was not the past that I thought I had (all these years) been remembering. I did not, even when I had finished the book, see clearly many things that I see now. The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the god’s surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound. (*TWHF* 253-4)

Periodically, her consciousness of time was not as exact as she would have liked. She says of the early years with Psyche, “the years, doubtless, went round then as now, but in my memory it seems to have been all springs and summers” (*TWHF* 22). Although she may not be able to see it at the time of writing, there is a hint here that soul time runs on a different timetable than what

we normally count as time.⁸⁵ Then, when she attempts the writing of the pivotal chapter on which her “charge against the gods chiefly rests,” memory once again is unstable: “Yet it is hard to know perfectly what I was thinking while those huge, silent moments went past. By remembering it too often I have blurred the memory itself” (*TWHF* 117). Once Orual is separated from Psyche, she falls back more heavily on the use of her rational faculties. Yet, even in her attempt at a logical account, her struggle for a pure linear narrative is often broken up by her present complaints against the gods. During the famine they continue the sacrifice of beasts, trying to placate Ungit and get some sort of relief—Orual interjects here that “food for the gods must always be found somehow, even when the land starves” (*TWHF* 79). After Psyche is taken, Orual slips into a raving sleep. At this point, she again switches to present tense: “Now mark yet again the cruelty of the gods. There is no escape from them into sleep or madness, for they can pursue you into them with dreams” (*TWHF* 80). Without realizing, she is probing close to the true Reality with her broken narrative—the gods, if they be real, must be eternal and beyond her present reality—thus any speech about the gods must be in the present, for they reside not only in historical time, but in all possible times. If the gods were cruel to take Psyche away from her, then they are still cruel in the present, and must be eternally cruel.

After hearing the “sacred story” told by the priest in Essur, Orual is overcome with anger and a sense of injustice—the gods have told the story wrong, they have “spat” in her face (*TWHF* 243). She determines to set the case right through the writing of her story. On the return trip, however, her keen observation breaks (on the way she detailed the reapers and the harvest fields accurately). Indignation is clouding her reason: “I can tell nothing of our journey back to Glome. There were seven or eight days of it, and we passed many notable places . . . But my eyes and

⁸⁵ The Greek word *psyche* means soul. In Apuleius Psyche becomes the allegorical equivalent of the soul seeking Love (Cupid).

ears were shut up” (*TWHF* 247). Emotion cannot be contained wholly by the intellect, and her anger again awakes her “old quarrel with the gods” (*TWHF* 244). This begins the process she must take before the unification of her divided nature can occur. In Part II, she warns her readers that the gods “so drenched” her mind with “seeings” that her ability to discern between dream and waking is reduced (*TWHF* 276). She cannot with any certainty assure her reader that her visions were “what men call real or what men call dream” (*TWHF* 277). Her questioning of established truth (that which many see is normally considered reality) is evidence of how far she is removed now from a solely rational focus: “But things that many see may have no taste or moment in them at all, and things that are shown only to one may be spears and water-spouts of truth from the very depth of truth” (*TWHF* 277). The final vision, however, she is careful to state, is “no dream”; she walked into it with her “eyes wide open” (*TWHF* 285). Her blindness is finally falling away, allowing her to see into Realities beyond the text of her own words, her own book. She reads her complaint before the judge—and through her own story she becomes transported into a Divine Myth larger than any words—she concludes that her rational account is “Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words” (*TWHF* 308).

Yet, we must not forget that the majority of the text is filled with a mass of small, realistic details that build a world far more specific and real than anything Apuleius was attempting to do. The reader senses that these are the “sort of things that happen” given the immediate situation. When Orual demands an answer of Bardia concerning the riddle of Psyche’s invisible palace and her unknown lover, Bardia hesitates, “drawing little scratches in the earth” with “a pebble” and needs to be prompted before he speaks (*TWHF* 136). This detail presents the reader with the quandary of a powerful leader of soldiers, a man, who, nevertheless, is under the authority of a woman of royal blood, all in a single descriptive line. Lewis is putting

into practice the advice he sent to Arthur C. Clarke that “all material should be *used*” in a work of art (*CL III* 412).⁸⁶ He continues in the letter, applying the dictum to fiction, “If you write a historical novel, the period must be essential to the effect . . . What’s the excuse for locating one’s story on Mars unless ‘Martianity’ is through & through *used*.” The note he places at the bottom concerning this clause of the letter reads: “Emotionally & atmospherically *as well as* logically” (*CL III* 412). While Lewis uses both types of realism to establish his historical setting, realism of content may be most significant in making readers place the novel into the genre of historical fiction. Realism of content makes the novel work “logically” and fit into the rational mind’s categories. Presentational realism throughout the text, but especially important to establish the vivid details amid Orual’s strange visions in Part II, contributes to the atmosphere of the text. Lewis is trying to engage the imagination as well as the intellect. Scholars have had difficulty classifying this work because they are ignoring Lewis’s own ideas about realism. In one sense, it is realistic historical fiction, but as one writer has pointed out, historical fiction generally includes some recognizable figure or prominent place—here Greece is a minor factor in the story, and traditional figures are missing (Myers, *Bareface* 5-6).⁸⁷ Ian Storey insists that the text is a “novel masquerading as historical fiction” reading the time and place indicators as “uncertain” and finding “no historical figures” (“Classical” 6). The presence of the dreams and visions and the lessening of content realism in Part II has made a label of “historical fiction” inadequate. Likewise, those who focus on the modernistic elements (specifically the

⁸⁶ January 20, 1954.

⁸⁷ Myers, however, does qualify her statement and considers *Till We Have Faces* as a realistic historical novel—the historical event she chooses to connect the text with is the “Incarnation, the historical birth of Jesus Christ” (*Bareface* 6). If one were to approach the book without a Christianized viewpoint, this would be difficult to argue. Lewis may indeed have intended the god in the story to be a pre-Incarnate version of Christ, but the text is not connected directly to the birth of Christ as a historical event, and one could conceivably make a case against equating the god of the Mountain with Christ.

psychological components) are ready to label this as a modern novel (Radmacher, Gibbons, Honda).⁸⁸

The confusing (at least in a genre sense) of various kinds of realism combined with the fantastic, otherworldly Realities intruding into the text, makes this story hard to place. A comparison from the text itself may illustrate this complexity of definition. In one of her visions, Orual carries an empty bowl, journeying to the deadlands seeking the water of death. The bowl is actually her book of complaint, Part I of the text we have. This narrative, as long as it is viewed solely through a rationalistic focus, remains empty—Orual cannot receive the Divine Realities hidden in the text until she accepts the emptiness of her words. In a similar way, Lewis is using the text as a whole as a bowl filled with Divine Myth. The degree to which the poetry of his central idea seeps through and fills the reader may depend on the reader himself. Thus, classifications may vary simply based on each individual's level of receptivity to the "kappa element," or the "something else" within the text. This paper seeks to illuminate and participate in these tensions by placing the text directly into Lewis's conception of *Story*, a linear narrative that serves as a container for a non-linear Myth. As such, perhaps Lewis only asks that we enjoy the narrative, suspend our rational beliefs, and enter into the story imaginatively.

Gilbert Meilaender, in his article "Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience," ties Lewis's work on story with Stephen Crites's ideas about the natural sequencing of linear narrative in the human experience of life. Meilaender notes that humans constantly seek "lasting refreshment" in something that is immune to the "corrosive powers of time" (149).⁸⁹ Meilaender concludes that myth allows an experience of the timeless, something

⁸⁸ See the earlier summary of classifications of the text.

⁸⁹ Meilaender opens his argument with a quote from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* ("Theology" 147): Lucy comes to a spell in the wizard's book labeled "for the refreshment of the spirit" (*VDT* 134). The spell is really a story, lovely while being read, and forgotten afterwards, but which becomes the standard for all subsequent stories

that cannot exist within abstract reasoning, but also qualifies this with Lewis's notions of *Story* ("Theology" 149). While myth only "temporarily eclipses" the "gap between time and eternity," narrative allows humans to taste the mythic realm while still residing in time ("Theology" 156). Meilaender, however, does not apply these ideas to any of Lewis's fiction—his focus is on the use of narrative to convey theological truths. Mara Donaldson, however, does apply these ideas to *Till We Have Faces* in her article "Orual's Story and the Art of Retelling." Donaldson calls *Till We Have Faces* "a story about the nature and importance of story," and divides her analysis of the text among three stories: Orual's retelling, Psyche's explanation on the mountain, and the priest in Essur's ritual story (157, 159-161). She contrasts Orual's linear narrative both with Psyche's tale of personal experience, and with the priest's ritual story based on the seasonal cycles of nature ("Orual" 168-9). Donaldson's ideas about temporality in narrative apply here, but less so her discussion on Lewis's ideas about narrative as *Logos* ("made thing") and *Poiema* (the "activity of making").⁹⁰

Before we look closer at Orual's story, a further look at some of Stephen Crites's ideas is needed. In the words of Crites, Orual's complaint is an example of a mundane story, a human attempt to put a sacred story into words ("Narrative" 296).⁹¹ Orual disputes with the "sacred story" told by the priest in Essur, and decides to move the "sacred" into a more precise and truthful account based on her life perspective. Crites's definition of a sacred story is "a story

Lucy reads. All Lucy remembers is that "It was about a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill" (*VDT* 135). Lucy has stumbled upon one of Lewis's ideal *Stories*—she remembers the concrete objects in the story (likely described in the solidarity of the senses with presentational realism) and the lovely feeling that she received from the atmosphere as a whole (a Myth is conveyed).

⁹⁰ However, the terms *Logos* and *Poiema* can easily be applied to the focus here on story and myth. Donaldson gets these terms from *An Experiment in Criticism*, and they appear to be another way to express the myth/story ideas Lewis presented in the chapter "On Myth." Donaldson does not emphasize this aspect of Lewis's ideas here, but for the purposes of this paper note that Lewis calls *Poiema* the "non-literary and non-verbal" component (like Lewis's myth) that arouses "imagination, emotions and thoughts" within the reader (*EIC* 136). *Poiema* begins in the *Logos* and cannot exist without it (the words convey the non-literary component).

⁹¹ Crites is using the term "mundane" in the sense of *mundus*, an earthy story.

within the story,” a text that does not reside in words, but can live in ritual and sometimes in poetry (“Narrative” 295). According to Crites, a sacred story (or what this paper calls Divine Myth) is “not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling-places,” a story that men can awake to, but can never invent on their own (“Narrative” 295, 296). Similar to Lewis’s tension between the plot and the theme in story, Crites speaks of human existence as a constant mediation between mundane and sacred stories, a reality of existence that can only be contained in narrative (“Narrative” 298). Crites ends his argument with two issues facing narrative in the modern world—issues that connect with Lewis’s divergent ways in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (Meilaender 152). The first, Crites’s “strategy of abstraction,” is a reduction of life into non-narrative, “atemporal,” rational generalities (“Narrative” 308); this strategy is important for science and corresponds, according to Meilaender, with the “arid,” “sterile” Northern way in Lewis’s allegory (“Theology” 153). The second, the “strategy of contraction,” focuses on the experience of the body in a fragmented, temporal narrative—moments in time, instant experiences of isolated images and sensations that are thought to embody the “concrete” (“Narrative” 309). This is Lewis’s Southern way, where thought is restricted to the immediate moment of gratification of the body (Meilaender 153). Again, we are faced with the dilemma of division, and Crites, like Lewis, seeks a resolution of the fragmented self through narrative (“Narrative” 309). Donaldson believes that Orual writes two books, the second of which “deconstructs” the first. The writing of both parts, however, allows her to gain knowledge about her divided self and about the gods, the writing acting as a means of transformation as the gods are made “accessible” and “mediated by her story” (“Orual” 162). The final section of this paper will examine how story mediates transformation in the life of Orual.

Chapter 5: Story as Transformation

Orual: A Divided Life

Lewis may have called the hero of *The Pilgrim's Regress* "John" in an attempt at a generic "everyman" figure, but Orual in *Till We Have Faces*, with her skeptical mind, is a successful portrait of modern humanity.⁹² She lives a divided life, insisting on a scientific approach to history, but to do so, she finds that she must bury part of her being. This way of living works, and she becomes an active, powerful, and just queen. Arnem, the younger priest, writes a tribute to her at the end of her text: "This book was all written by Queen Orual of Glome, who was the most wise, just, valiant, fortunate and merciful of all princes known in our parts of the world" (*TWHF* 308-9). In her personal life, however, she increasingly finds only emptiness. The things she cannot fit into her rationalistic philosophy trouble her. Near the end, she finds that even language breaks down, failing her in her attempt at a pure account of her own history. Orual is bothered by other accounts—like that of Psyche, Tarin, and Ansit—that do not fit with her own memory of the events. Her degree of self-knowledge is based directly on her level of receptivity to the things hidden within her own text—this renewal and transformation of the self directly results from her participation in her own story.

There are three basic concepts that Orual cannot fit comfortably into her view of the world: the traditional worship of Ungit in the city of Glome with all its contradictions and strange, repellent practices; the concept of sacrifice, both within the worship structure she grows

⁹² Mark Edwards contrasts the names Psyche (soul) with Orual, and suggests that the name "Orual" may be an "emblem of the body" in opposition to the soul ("Classicist" 68). Others suggest that Lewis got the name from a French herb. Doreen Wood notes that Orual may be a "written variant of *Orval*, a French name for the herb *Salvia Clerea*. A book of herbs from 1658 called it, "Orval, a certain herb otherwise called Clary or Clear-eye." It was sometimes translated *Godes-eie* and *See-bright* (Vol. VII, p.211)" ("Pattern" 84). This would suggest that Lewis intends Orual to be clear-sighted in spiritual things, which is not the case for the majority of the book, but she becomes this way when she begins to be receptive of Divine Myth.

up in and beyond as a general principle of religion; and finally the gods themselves, their silence, their riddles, and their elusiveness, resisting containment in any tidy rational structures. As a child, Orual is frightened of the old priest; she dislikes the smell of blood and “burnt fat and singed hair and wine and stale incense” that hang about him, a smell Orual comes to associate with “holiness” (*TWHF* 11). His clothes only added to her terror, the skins and “dried bladders” and the awful bird mask (*TWHF* 11). Later, after the fever, the priest himself looks “like a vulture” (*TWHF* 45). The image of the old priest recalls Lewis’s description of History in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, an old man with “a pale, bird-like face” (177). History functions as a guide for John, edging him closer to the true path through his explanation of desire and the long years of pictures sent by a kind Landlord, giving messages to the people living in Pagus. Perhaps the old priest could have instructed Orual in a similar fashion, but she will not condescend to ask it of him.⁹³ Orual wants to think of the old priest as “a mere schemer and a politic,” but she struggles to maintain that view when she witnesses the priest’s responses (*TWHF* 54). The priest shows no terror at an angry King Thom who has just lost his queen and gained another girl baby, nor does he fear the king later in the Pillar Room when a dagger is thrust against his ribs (*TWHF* 15, 53). All Orual sees is calm confidence, the priest is “sure of Ungit.” This experience disturbs Orual with a sense of otherness: “The room,” she says, “was full of spirits, and the horror of holiness” (*TWHF* 54).

The whole system of Ungit worship is repulsive to Orual. She finds the temple oppressive and describes it as a dark, “imprisoning, smothering sort of place” (*TWHF* 269). The rite of the Year’s birth is one example of repulsive ritual practice. Orual thought of it in terms of excessive

⁹³ The character History, however, is not frightening in the same way as the old priest excites terror. John finds the old man, History, a hermit in a little cave. He initially describes History as “so old and thin that his hands were transparent and John thought that a little wind would have blown him away” (*PR* 164). The hermit is kind, feeds him, gives him a place to sleep, and readily answers John’s questions.

slaughter, mentioning the waste of wine and blood poured out through the night (*TWHF* 269). The temple eats up valuable funds, people, and animals, draining the life out of Glome. For example, the temple girls become barren after a few seasons and slowly turn into the “toothless crones” who sweep and tend the fires (*TWHF* 269). Ungit devours and no good seems to come of it: “I thought how the seed of men that might have gone to make hardy boys and fruitful girls was drained into that house, and nothing given back; how the silver that men had earned hard and needed was also drained in there, and nothing given back; and how the girls themselves were devoured and were given nothing back” (*TWHF* 269-70). Orual is disgusted at the amount of slaughter at other times as well: before the King’s wedding the courtyard is full of the slaughter (*TWHF* 10), the King’s hope for a son demands a monthly killing of beasts (*TWHF* 13), and despite the famine, Ungit still must have her due in ritual sacrifice (*TWHF* 79). She also cannot get to the business of fighting Argan until the gods “have their bit” and the bull is sacrificed (*TWHF* 217). As queen, Orual is most “irked” by her duties associated with the temple (*TWHF* 233-4).

Sacrifice troubles Orual—it seems counterproductive and destructive. There comes a point when Ungit is not even satisfied with “bulls and rams and goats” and needs the life of a man or woman instead (*TWHF* 45). The lot falls on Psyche, who the commoners have taken to calling “the Accursed”; she is the one who will be sacrificed in the “Great Offering” to appease the Brute (*TWHF* 47). Orual is horrified, and refuses to call it “sacrifice,” to her it is “murder” instead (*TWHF* 71, 77). Other times she simply cannot say the word. In a conversation with the Fox, Orual asks about the efficacy of the “Great Offering” but finds that she cannot give the sacrifice a name and breaks off speaking instead (*TWHF* 84). If any other kind of sacrifice has no effect, why should the offering of a human life do anything? She begins to view her own people,

especially in regard to religious practice, as barbarians. After finding Psyche alive and well on the mountain after the sacrifice, yet bothered by what kind of being visits Psyche at night, Orual attempts to speak to the gods directly. Her boldness to go outside of protocol shows her distaste for the whole system—she speaks to the gods outside of ritual, “not in a temple, and without a sacrifice” (*TWHF* 150). Her aversion to sacrifice shows up again near the end of her life on the trip to Essur. The temple in Essur seems to be an improvement over what she is used to; this one is clean and empty and has “none of the common temple smells about it” (*TWHF* 240).⁹⁴ Kilby has pointed out that blood sacrifice is lacking in this temple. If there is any sacrifice here, it is in the style of Cain—flowers and fruit (“*TWHF*” 179). Orual is intrigued, and starts asking questions. The priest here begins telling her the “sacred story,” which she soon finds echoes her own life. Schakel has correctly noted that Orual interrupts the story right when the priest would have said the word “sacrifice”—she cannot accept it as a part of religious ritual, and wishes to purge the idea from her own story as well (“*TWHF*” 287, *TWHF* 246).⁹⁵

Mixed up in all the horror of ritual and sacrifice are the Beings hovering behind. Orual’s rejection of the rituals is based on her doubts and uncertainties about the gods. She shares the Fox’s basic confusion at the words of the old priest; everything the blind man says seems to be contradictory. The Brute, the being Psyche must be offered to, is described first as a monster, then as a shadow, then as a goddess, and finally as a god (*TWHF* 47-48). It is all “in a mystery” says the priest; the awful Brute is “Ungit herself, or Ungit’s son, the god of the mountain; or both” (*TWHF* 48). If a man is offered, he becomes Ungit’s husband; a woman becomes the bride

⁹⁴ Note that at this point, Orual has not truly sacrificed anything of herself yet. The god tells her to “die before you die,” and she learns of a kind of spiritual, soul death in Part II of the narrative (*TWHF* 279). Orual knows only words, and has not lived as a whole person—she has excluded the need for blood sacrifice both literally and figuratively in her life. According to Ansit, she has done something more horrible, “drank up” the “blood” of the lives of her people; her people have sacrificed for her (*TWHF* 265).

⁹⁵ Schakel also notes that sacrifice is not central to *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. He argues that sacrifice is tied up with imagination and myth, and both of these are weaker in Lewis’s allegory than in the text of *Till We Have Faces* (*Reason* 122).

of Ungit's son. Another paradox is the loving and devouring motif—those who are offered become married to the goddess/god, but they are also eaten (*TWHF* 49). The Fox objects, unable to comprehend that the one sacrificed can be both perfect and wicked, both beautiful and the cause of impurity in the land (*TWHF* 49-50). In the conversation between Orual and Psyche before the “Great Offering,” Orual calls the god “a worm, or a giant eft, or a spectre,” and views Psyche as his prey (*TWHF* 72). Psyche, however, focuses on being his bride and tries to explain to Orual that there may not be much difference between marriage and being eaten—she understands something about death that Orual cannot grasp (*TWHF* 72). For Orual, any god who demands human sacrifice must be “viler than the vilest men” (*TWHF* 71).

Orual persists in her belief about the cruelty of the gods, and though she may live as if they are not present, she still blames them for all her sufferings. She finds that she cannot escape them, not even while asleep or in madness (*TWHF* 81). They tempt her to think of delight even when she knows she should be stern, hard, and sober. On the way to gather the remains of Psyche she steps outside of her account and criticizes the gods, “We are their bubbles; they blow us big before they prick us” (*TWHF* 97). She asks for an answer, and receives only a riddle: is the palace real or not? To Orual, this is “divine mockery”—the riddle cannot be tested, and resides outside of all rational proofs (*TWHF* 134). Orual is demanding clarity and certainty, and thus attributes their silence to what must be their malignant natures. Instead of an answer, they send rain (*TWHF* 125). Rosemary Wright, in her dissertation tracing Biblical allusions in the text of *Till We Have Faces*, correctly calls rain a direct sign from the gods, showing their care and concern—Orual however, is unable to read the sign properly, and blames them for their lack of answer (“Biblical” 39-48).⁹⁶ For her, the gods are unfair, they “hint and hover,” and “whisper

⁹⁶ Wright notes the following examples of rain as signs from the gods: the rain Orual hears on the roof when she wakes from her raving sleep after Psyche has been offered (*TWHF* 82), the rain Orual meets going up the mountain

(words we cannot understand)” whenever we wish to be alone, and then “vanish,” and stay silent when we actually seek them (*TWHF* 249). She concludes that it is all a cruel game. Nothing seems logical—holiness is all tied up with darkness, and all “sacred matters” are filled with contradictions.⁹⁷ Orual’s explanation of the rite of the Year’s birth applies to all the things sacred in their essential paradoxes: “it is and it is not” (*TWHF* 268).

Orual decides she must remain true to her reason and chooses to avoid the inconvenient contradictions that she cannot resolve. She eluded the idea of sacrifice through a linguistic twist, renaming it as “murder” and not allowing others to speak of it. She does similar things to escape the acceptance of the temple practices and believing in the gods themselves. Orual relies heavily on the Fox’s philosophy, but at first it is not a complete reliance, as she at times questions his ways. He is quick to respond to hints of the supernatural with “It’s only lies of poets, lies of poets, child. Not in accordance to nature” (*TWHF* 8). Orual, however, notices the “lilt” in his voice and the “brightness” of his eyes when he slips into reciting myth or poetry (*TWHF* 9). When Glome’s fortunes suddenly shift after the offering of Psyche, Orual asks the Fox what he now thinks of Ungit. The Fox calls it all a “cursed chance” that happens at times to “nourish the beliefs of barbarians” (*TWHF* 85). According to Myers, Orual is continually trying to decide whether to believe in supernatural or in natural causation (*Bareface* 27). The Fox’s philosophy focuses on the “god within” using reason and self-discipline; his doctrine is “clear, hard, limited, and simple” (*TWHF* 303). Orual loves to learn, and enjoys her lessons with the Fox. Despite her doubts about the depth of his philosophy, she eventually makes a choice, and subscribes more

the first time (*TWHF* 93), the rain while she speaks with Psyche in the valley (*TWHF* 125), and also the rain after Orual’s prayer (*TWHF* 150) (“Biblical” 39-48).

⁹⁷ Mara Donaldson, in her book *Holy Places are Dark Places: C. S. Lewis and Paul Ricoeur on Narrative Transformation*, examines the various meanings of “darkness” in the metaphor “holy places are dark places” from *Till We Have Faces* (72-76). Donaldson presents how the old priest, the Fox and Orual all approach “darkness” in different ways.

deeply to the Fox's ways after the banishment of Psyche. At this time, Orual says, "I wanted hard things now, and to pile up knowledge" (*TWHF* 184). To anyone looking on, it might look like prudence on her part, a way to prepare for Queenship, but Orual knows inside that she is primarily fortifying her mind against the gods.

In respect to the temple practices, she supports the young priest, Arnom, who also has come under the Fox's influence. Orual finds this priest safer—no holy darkness and no Ungit smell clings to him—and as queen she negotiates a closer political alliance with the temple than her father ever achieved (*TWHF* 205). Even the temple itself becomes cleaner and new windows expose the Ungit stone within. Orual decides that Ungit is "now weakened" and there is less to fear from her (*TWHF* 234). As a wealthy queen, she provides Arnom with silver to set up a new goddess, craved in a woman's form after the Greek tradition. She wonders about her motivation, but decides it is only an attempt to "defeat" "the old, hungry, faceless Ungit" who terrified her during childhood (*TWHF* 234). The old Ungit is a shapeless, faceless stone, which originated from the deep earth's "dark and weight and heat" (*TWHF* 270).⁹⁸ Arnom talks about Ungit as if she is only a symbol of the earth; a signifier removed so far from the sign, so far from the Real god behind, that there is no risk of intrusion. Arnom's clear rational abstraction separates him from the old priest's experience of holiness.

⁹⁸ Lewis's letter to Jocelyn Gibb on April 11, 1956, concerning the pictorial wrapper on the book, gives us a good idea of the contrast between the two goddesses (*CL III* 735-6). He uses the word "πέρας" ("limit") to represent the statue of Aphrodite, and the phrase "τὸ ἄπειρον" ("boundlessness") to represent the stone Ungit. He further explains the two ideas through a chart. Ungit is to be a "living rock," "old," and "barbarous." Her form is "sexy," "ugly," "indefinite," and "suggestive of life." Aphrodite, however, is made of "cut stone," a new image, which belongs to the "civilized" world. The statue is sexy "only in the sense of trying to be pretty." The Aphrodite statue has a "definite," "rigid" form, that looks "dead as a Dutch doll" (*CL III* 736). Lewis may have also been thinking about the distinction between the heavenly Venus and the earthly Venus. In the text of Apuleius, Venus is at times in her heavenly aspect (*Venus Caelestis*), but most often in earthly form (*Venus Vulgaris*) (Kenney 19-20). This tradition is detailed in Plato's *Symposium* (180d2 – 181b8). Lewis differentiates between the two goddesses in other places; for example, see Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (375). A case could be made presenting Ungit as the Venus of the people (*Vulgaris*) and Aphrodite as the heavenly Venus.

Orual finds, nonetheless, that the gods do intrude; like pesky flies, they come when they are not wanted. Yet, since they do not fit comfortably into her naturalistic view of the world, Orual still attempts to avoid them. While remembering the sacrifice of Psyche, she outlines her strategy: “The nearest thing we have to a defence against them (but there is no real defence) is to be very wide awake and sober and hard at work, to hear no music, never to look at earth or sky, and (above all) to love no one” (*TWHF* 80-1). To varying degrees, she is successful. On the trip up the mountain, she is confronted with nature, the “huge world” begins putting “mad ideas” into her heart, and she wonders if all her anger is misplaced. The very “heart” of the world seems to be dancing, and it pulls her in, tempting her to set aside her sadness and dance as well (*TWHF* 96). The beauty of the world speaks the language of Myth, drawing her away from common sense. Orual, however, decides that “reason called for” an avoidance of laughter in one who is going to bury the bones of her sister (*TWHF* 97). Her reason cannot receive the new “mad ideas,” and must persist in what she already knows: Psyche is dead. So she makes a decision on the side of reason: “I ruled myself” (*TWHF* 97). What follows is a series of choices supporting the reason and barring all imaginative influence. She ignores the hints the gods send—the rain, the glimpse of the strange palace, and the beauty of nature. She not only fortifies her mind with knowledge, but also hardens her body by pursuing a “hard and joyless” strength. She continues her fencing lessons with Bardia and later adds horseback riding, wanting the physical bodily discipline to “drive all the woman out” of her (*TWHF* 184). There are, at times, breaks in her armour. On windy, rainy nights, she sometimes grieves for Psyche and calls on the gods, but always, she says, “I would set to and rebuild the dam” as soon as possible afterwards (*TWHF* 184). The reason dislikes things out of order, and if given absolute control, it will seek to build its own tiny kingdom, unmolested by any outer influences. Thus Orual, by the time she reads her

complaint before the judge, can say to the gods: “There’s no room for you and us in the same world. You’re a tree in whose shadow we can’t thrive. We want to be our own” (*TWHF* 291).⁹⁹

This desire for absolute freedom and control within the reason, leads Orual to a string of actions that outwardly make her prosperous, but inwardly demolish her soul. The choice to wear the veil, although initially used to hide her outer identity, comes to strip her of an inner identity. She uses the veil as a “treaty” with her ugliness, a way to control something she really has no power over (*TWHF* 181). The veil aids her, giving her supremacy first over her father, and then over many others, visiting nobles and kings, and common people coming for justice and judgment (*TWHF* 182). The veil is an outer symbol of her inner burying of the self. She wants Orual to die, and bit by bit, her persona as Queen wins out (*TWHF* 211).¹⁰⁰ “I locked Orual up,” she says, “or laid her asleep as best I could somewhere deep down inside me; she lay curled there. It was like being with child, but reversed; the thing I carried in me grew slowly smaller and less alive” (*TWHF* 226). Her reason cannot handle the emotions that bubble up when she hears the chains at the well swing in the wind; it sounds like Psyche weeping. The emotions belong to the buried Orual, the part still “refusing to die” (*TWHF* 229). Sharon Jebb notes that Lewis’s use of parentheses in this passage illustrates how the rational Queen treats the inner Orual: “the old Orual is walled off, buried alive, but still—somewhere—present” (118). Orual physically walls in the well, but finds the sound still exists—the weeping of Psyche is interior to her life, and it cannot be removed by any outer action. She finds that the sound follows her into dreams, and in dreams, she sees that she has “gagged with stone, not a well but Psyche (or Orual)

⁹⁹ Thomas Howard, in his article “*Till We Have Faces*: the Uttermost Farthing,” presents the demand for freedom as the main emphasis of *Till We Have Faces*. Howard places Orual’s demands for freedom on her own terms as the main reason she cannot experience the gods (“*TWHF*” 159). This may be part of the picture, but not the whole. Orual did not set out to demand her freedom, but came to that way of living through her early choices to favour rational analysis over imaginative experience.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis uses the title “Queen” in the later section of Part I to signify Orual’s surface persona. “Queen” will be capitalized to signify this outer identity that wars with the inner “Orual.”

herself” (*TWHF* 235). Then the sound disappears, and she defeats Essur a year later (*TWHF* 235). The juxtaposition of these ideas should not be a surprise, her reason is simply conquering more territory in her mind and soul, and this control passes into her exterior persona of the Queen. Inner control gains her greater political power. Yet, her outer success is no indication of the inner life and health of her soul.

All the memories of Psyche, all her pain, and her anger at the gods—these reside in her inner soul, in Orual. If she can make the inner Orual “vanish” within the Queen, she will gain reason’s goal: “the gods would almost be cheated” (*TWHF* 201). Behind the veil, and walled up, Orual does vanish, and her strength as the Queen increases. Hiding her weakness emphasizes other strengths—for instance, the beauty of her voice is suddenly noticed, and the shape of her virginal figure feeds fantasies about her possible beauty of face (*TWHF* 228, 232). The stories that begin to circulate about her face are more revealing than the Queen realizes. Some say her face is “frightful beyond endurance,” or that it is really an animal face hidden beneath the white cloth. However, the best story, she remembers, is the one about a lack of face, the terror of “emptiness” behind her veil (*TWHF* 228). Why does the story of an absence become her favourite? Why not the story that suggests her face might contain “dazzling” beauty instead? Perhaps the Queen somehow senses the truth that behind her veil, behind the Queenship, there really is nothing there. Perhaps she thinks that nothingness is better than ugliness, and she can gloat in her victory over the weak Orual. Still, she ultimately finds the actions and power of her Queenship empty, lamenting at the end, “I did and I did and I did—and what does it matter what I did?” (*TWHF* 236). The end of each day brought her out of Queenship and back to aloneness with herself—but here she finds only “a nothingness,” she has no self left (*TWHF* 236). Her

insistence on a purely rational life has drained everything away, and there is only a negation, a vast emptiness behind her veil. Orual discovers that the soul cannot live on reason alone.

Orual's limited viewpoint is further exposed through her interactions with Psyche, the night before the offering, and then later on the mountain. Psyche is receptive to the old priest; she is open to other alternatives in ways that Orual is not. Although she appreciates all the Fox taught her, she realizes it is incomplete. The night in the prison room she tries to explain it to Orual: "[The Fox] calls the whole world a city. But what's a city built on? There's earth beneath. And outside the wall? Doesn't all the food come from there as well as all the dangers? . . . things growing and rotting, strengthening and poisoning, things shining wet . . . in one way (I don't know which way) more like, yes, even more like the House of—" (*TWHF* 70-71). Orual shudders and provides the name "Ungit."¹⁰¹ Psyche is having trouble speaking because she is suggesting things she experiences with her imagination. Here is Lewis's Demeter again, warm, dark, and fertile, providing life. Psyche cannot fully share Orual's belief that the gods are vile, monstrous, and cruel. Maybe, offers Psyche, the gods do not do horrible things, or maybe it is only our perspective that is skewed—maybe we would change our assumptions if we could see more of their Reality (*TWHF* 71). She readily admits that there are things beyond understanding, but she is able to balance the contradictions, open to the possibility that being devoured and married to the god may both occur, and might even be the same event (*TWHF* 71).

Psyche also has a different opinion about sacrifice. While alone on the mountain, tied to the Tree, one thing supports her mind. She finds the thing hard to put into words, but she says it

¹⁰¹ Kilby notes that Psyche never mentions the name of Ungit directly (*Images* 135). Yet, she is receptive to the old priest's teachings, and allows room for Ungit-like ideas and imagery. Whether her silence about Ungit herself has any significance (Kilby ties it into his theological argument that Lewis is producing a pre-Christian text with Christian themes), it cannot be argued that Psyche is wholly rejecting Glome's religious practice. Perhaps Psyche is like the devout heathen in *The Last Battle* who lives his life a sincere worshiper of Tash, yet is welcomed into the heavenly Narnia by Aslan.

contained philosophy, the Fox's ideas about the "gods or 'the divine nature,'" and ideas from the priest, things "about the blood and the earth and how sacrifice makes the crops grow" (*TWHF* 109-10). Her receptivity helps Psyche merge ideas, or at least hold them parallel, and gain strength Orual has never experienced. It is significant that when Psyche is able to do this, the weather changes, and the rain Glome so needs, arrives. Psyche now knows "that the gods really are," and that her sacrifice will help her people (*TWHF* 110). She, not Orual, experienced the "longing—to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from," and she is willing to meet the god, even if it means the sacrifice of all she has ever known (*TWHF* 75-76). Psyche knows that there is something Beyond, and it is worth seeking. Her imaginative openness leads her to Divine Myth, beginning first in vague longings, then through the teachings of the Fox and the old priest, and finally through direct experience.

Orual may have reasoned away the absurd invitation of the beauty of the world, calling her heart to dance; Psyche does not. Psyche does not understand Orual's worry about "doing" things—just "be merry" she says, and then asks, "Why should our hearts not dance?" (*TWHF* 105). Psyche is practiced in noticing and embracing beauty. She remembers childhood days in the hills looking at the beauty, enjoying "the colour and the smell" of nature (*TWHF* 74). Now, Orual finds Psyche strong and beautiful but in rags. Orual cannot fit all these earthly realities together, because she cannot see the Divine Reality that Psyche does. Psyche has a "soul-house" now, and a certainty that resembles that of the priest, certain about Ungit, unafraid of the dagger between his ribs (*TWHF* 120). Orual sees Psyche, but not the palace, nor the food nor the wine she is given. Orual has allowed reason to shut down a door in her mind. The glimpse of the palace in the fog, and the voice of the god later, she pushes aside. Reason alone cannot contain belief.

Finally, like any good scientist, she seeks verification. On her next trip to see Psyche, she demands that Psyche test and prove the theory. Orual believes that the being that visits Psyche at night is hideous, even if she permits the idea that he is divine. She asks Psyche, “What sort of god would he be who dares not show his face?” (*TWHF* 159). The beautiful do not hide their faces, she reasons. Psyche may not have physical sight of her lover, but she has the knowledge of a bride, data that goes beyond Orual’s limited experience and imagination. Orual is convinced that Psyche is “afraid of the test” (*TWHF* 163). Since Orual knows that she cannot “test” the image of the palace she briefly saw in the fog, she selfishly uses Psyche to run another sort of test. Orual tries reasoning with Psyche, but finds she cannot reach Psyche’s mind—Psyche speaks a different language (*TWHF* 128). So she resorts to the “mercenary army” of the passions, using violence to threaten Psyche into submission (*TWHF* 178). Psyche is asked to take a lamp into her chamber and use her physical, mortal eyes to observe the god. Orual is convinced that the sight will “cure” Psyche, and bring her running back to Orual’s side, weeping (*TWHF* 123, 169). Psyche performs the test, but the consequences are not those included in Orual’s hypothesis. She has left out an important variable (the gods themselves and their decrees), limited her possibilities (the gods cannot be beautiful), and is thus surprised and terrified at the result. Psyche is sent into exile, and Orual is sentenced by the god, “You also shall be Psyche,” he says (*TWHF* 174). She has her answer; the test has indeed shown that the “gods are” part of reality, and so she returns home convinced that she is the object of their hatred (*TWHF* 175).

Orual: Learning to Taste

Once Orual has proven the terrible existence of the gods, she resigns herself to her fate, expecting at any moment to be sent into exile like Psyche or killed by the anger of the gods. Instead, she is given a long and prosperous life as a powerful queen. Her life, however, is marred

by a nagging emptiness inside and a persistent sense of the fundamental meaninglessness of life. Orual lives divided, and she is acutely aware of her diseased condition. Before urging Psyche to perform her test, Orual spends an anguished night, unable to “find out whether the doctrines of Glome or the wisdom of Greece were right” (*TWHF* 151). Are the gods real? Would they really ask sacrifice of us? Are there things too dark and deep to be seen clearly or framed in words? Or are words enough? Surely there is a natural explanation for all the strange happenings in the world. The two ways seem impossible to reconcile, and she aptly diagnoses her condition: “I saw that for years my life had been lived in two halves, never fitted together” (*TWHF* 151). Orual knows that Psyche is able to merge the two parts better than she can, and this knowledge fuels her jealousy.

Orual does not want to admit that the “chit of a girl” Psyche, might have a solution for her dividedness. Psyche understands that Orual does not need fixing or curing, but rather awakening. She attempts to initiate this transformation in Orual through the telling of her story. Psyche’s experience goes beyond words, but the use of story allows her to bring how she felt into words when alone before the West-wind god came (that deep strength from connecting reason and imagination), and how to describe the otherworldly beauty of her palace and that of her relationship with Cupid himself. The story is halting at times when she searches for the right words or analogies to convey her experience of Divine Reality to Orual. Orual, however, does not receive the story. She perceives herself wiser, more rational than Psyche, and thus sticks with her plans. She cannot receive the Demeter reality of blood and sacrifice and darkness, and she closes down her imagination.

There are other stories in the text. Orual cannot receive Psyche’s strange account because she earlier dismissed the old priest’s explanation of the sacred story and ritual surrounding the

“Great Offering.” His story is too horrifyingly close, suggesting things that will change her life and relationships irrevocably. Other stories are more distant, and Orual can stand back from them and rationally make use of their realities. For example, she is interested in the Fox’s escapes into myth and poetry. After the offering of Psyche, Orual remembers the stories of Iphigenia and Antigone she heard from the Fox. These stories spur her into action, and she determines that she will be another Antigone and go gather her sister’s bones (*TWHF* 86). Later, the sacred story from the priest in Essur also drives Orual to action.¹⁰² This priest tells the story using the words Lewis read in Apuleius, beginning with “Once upon a time in a certain land there lived a king and a queen who had three daughters, and the youngest was the most beautiful princess in the whole world . . .” (*TWHF* 241-2). Orual recognizes the story as her own, but twisted—she cannot receive the fact that the sisters were jealous, and begins picking the story apart, finding its errors. Just as she did with Psyche, she cannot listen, but instead continually interrupts the flow of the tale with her own questions and anger. Orual calls the Apuleius-style tale a “story belonging to a different world” (*TWHF* 243). In that world, the gods are visible to all and they openly commune with humans. Orual is convinced that if the world is really like that, if the gods would not “ask you to believe what contradicts your eyes and ears and nose and tongue and fingers,” then she would “have walked aright” (*TWHF* 244). Orual has lived her life longing for clarity; she is one of those individuals who “demand” to see everything “clearly, as if the gods were no more than letters written in a book” (*TWHF* 50). Her experience tells her that life is not clear like water, but she insists on living as if it is and then blames the gods for her dilemma.

¹⁰² Note that Orual is proficient in “using” stories as opposed to “receiving.” Lewis uses these terms in *An Experiment in Criticism* to outline the basic difference between readers. Those who “use” a text do “things with the work” but do not allow the text to indiscriminately work on them (*EIC* 85). These stories push her into action, but she does not really receive them as they are. The stories act as mirrors instead of windows—Orual receives nothing new, they only reflect back what she already knows or believes.

She may not have fully received the priest in Essur's tale, but it does break open her anger and force her back into memory. On the ride home to Glome, her gaze moves into the emptiness of her internal life, "recalling every passage of the true story, dragging up terrors, humiliations, struggles, and anguish" that were hidden for years. She likens the process to digging the self "out of a grave, out of a walled well"—Orual, the real Orual, is again allowed to "wake and speak" (*TWHF* 247). She is "with book, as a woman is with child" (*TWHF* 247). Once home, she begins to write. During the process of "sifting and sorting" the past, she learns the limitations of rational analysis and of memory and begins to see her dividedness and her need for transformation. The gods use her "own pen to probe" the wound and begin surgery (*TWHF* 254).¹⁰³

Orual's story leads her to see that both Athene and Demeter are needed; both the Fox's clear thinking philosophy and the earthy, terrible Ungit are part of the human soul. She cannot be whole while excluding one part of her being. The ways of the old priest do not mesh easily with Greek thought, but both are needed. Psyche somehow learns to live with the tension between the two ways, and her constant balancing of the one way against and with the other gives her strength deeper than both can give alone. Psyche remembers that the Fox admits that there are other Greek masters "who have taught that death opens a door out of a little, dark room . . . into a great, real place where the true sun shines" (*TWHF* 73). She is receptive to new ideas, while Orual is not. During Orual's writing, however, she begins to receive the dreams and visions that are detailed in Part II.¹⁰⁴ Her story is opening up her imagination to receive the messages of the gods through the visions. Like the "pictures" sent to the inhabitants of Pagus in *The Pilgrim's*

¹⁰³ See Lewis's essay "A Note on Jane Austen." Here he traces the changes in four of Austen's characters, calling their process of gaining self-awareness an experience of "undeception" or "awakening" (*SLE* 177).

¹⁰⁴ Orual notes at the beginning of Part II that the change began while she was writing; yet, she did not write the details of her shift in thinking within the text itself. Once she completes her book (Part I), she decides that there is not time to "mend the book" so she adds to it (*TWHF* 253).

Regress, Orual is being offered another way to see Reality, even amid her story of “disunion and conflict” (Urang 43).

The problem of defining reality/Reality plagues Orual from the beginning. Does she really see the palace? Is reality only what the physical eyes can see? Bardia has no answer, saying noncommittally, “I don’t know what’s *really*, when it comes to houses of gods” (*TWHF* 135). Then she asks the Fox if there might be such a thing as “soul-houses,” things that cannot be seen (*TWHF* 142). The Fox centers his answer on natural obstructions to sight—things can be too far away to see, or darkness can hinder sight. Yet, these obstructions can be tested or removed by human means. It is not hard to see how Orual reaches her decision that Psyche must test her lover with a lamp. For the scientific mind, all things can be solved and reality can be discerned, if only there is enough time, or materials, or means for observation. Orual learns, however, that there is a Reality beyond the earthly, testable matter. The gods appear to her, and speak, and there is, she says, no way to take a god’s voice for a mortal’s once you have heard that strange sound—“They are not to be mistaken” (*TWHF* 279).

Further, she learns what Psyche knew back in her prison room, that the Reality beyond might not be what we here perceive it to be. Orual originally believed that the gods must be horrible and ugly since they hide their faces. After the test with the lamp, Orual sees Cupid, in a lightning flash of beauty; her previously reasoned perception is suddenly overthrown with new sight (*TWHF* 173). Then, in the vision at the end of her life, she speaks again with the Fox, this time about justice. After her humbling rant, she is taken before the gods to be accused and now she despairs of receiving any mercy. The Fox strangely assures her that the gods are not just, asking, “What would become of us if they were?” (*TWHF* 297). This shocks Orual, who has demanded justice of the gods for years. Again, she finds that her ideas are incomplete or

inaccurate. If the gods are not just, then what are they? If they find her guilty, what will they do to her? Moreover, the Fox admits to her that he was not always honest in his teaching. He did not tell her that there is something in the worship of Ungit that can reach deeper than his “trim sentences” can (*TWHF* 295). Ungit may be “an image of the demon within” humanity, he says, but now he admits that the way of the “true gods is more like the house of Ungit” than his philosophy can put into words. He continues, sounding more and more like the old priest with his contradictions: “oh, it’s unlike too, more unlike than we yet dream, but that’s the easy knowledge, the first lesson; only a fool would stay there, posturing and repeating it. The priest knew at least that there must be sacrifices” (*TWHF* 295). The real gods “will have man . . . the very heart, center, ground, roots of a man; dark and strong and costly as blood” (*TWHF* 295). Orual learns that things may not be as they seem to human eyes. Sacrifice, though horrible to mortal minds, may do something deeper than she can see yet. The gods may be more beautiful, and yet, more terrible than she has ever permitted herself to think.

Orual is learning to live with paradoxes and contradictions that her rational sight cannot resolve. This is what Manlove calls a “synthesis through paradox” where “opposed views are neither exclusive nor complementary: they simply exist together, side by side, in suspension” (*Literary* 201, 195).¹⁰⁵ In Lewis’s book about prayer, he writes about heavenly Realities, and how remote they are from human perspectives. Humans may form ideas about the supernatural, but these images must be repeatedly shattered “in mercy” (*LM* 109). Orual finds that the gods, through her dreams and visions, shatter her perceptions of reality. Manlove notes that Lewis’s text in *Till We Have Faces*, “insists that uncertainty is of the very character of reality, that if we look to simple, clear or vivid solutions or experiences they are not to be had” (*Literary* 202). The otherworldly Reality “is and is not,” receding always from view into denser layers of mystery.

¹⁰⁵ Radmacher also quotes this in her argument about the modernistic nature of *Till We Have Faces* (168).

Orual finds that her own soul reflects the complexity of the gods, and, like the gods, it is often hidden from view. Here again Psyche displays a knowledge that Orual cannot touch. She can forgive false and foolish Redival and their angry father simply because of her knowledge about the hiddenness of the soul. In the prison room, facing her own death, Psyche says of Redival, “She also does what she doesn’t know” (*TWHF* 69). Later, in the same conversation, Psyche can see the hardness of Orual’s heart even while Orual denies it and pushes the diagnosis back onto Psyche herself (*TWHF* 75). Orual cannot see her own soul, and neither does she understand how she treats other people. Ansit, Bardia’s widow, tells Orual that she is “Gorged with other men’s lives, women’s too: Bardia’s, mine, the Fox’s, your sister’s—both your sisters” (*TWHF* 265). After the Pillar Room dream, Orual finally embraces this self-knowledge, calling herself a “swollen spider . . . gorged with men’s lives” (*TWHF* 276). While she has veiled her ugly face for most of her life, she has also veiled her soul away from her rational mind. In the vision of the pictures, Orual watches others try to pull Psyche away from her descent into the deadlands. Then Orual sees a womanly figure, “its face unknown” to her, who tries to entrap Psyche (*TWHF* 303). It is herself, but Orual has so succeeded in hiding her face from everyone, that she cannot even recognize it herself. Even the nature of her secret love for Bardia is mostly unknown to her own mind. At the end, she realizes that her love was actually “nine-tenths hatred” for she enjoyed seeing him mocked and hurt by others (*TWHF* 266). She finds that once the “craving” for him is gone, there is only a gap left (*TWHF* 267). She concludes that the soul is like the soil where the things that “show the brightest colours and put forth the most overpowering smell have not always the deepest root” (*TWHF* 267). Her love was simply a covering, a name disguising the hatred and loathing below. As she awakens to further truth, this love becomes “a sickening thing” to her (*TWHF* 267).

In a letter to Mary Van Deusen, Lewis writes about the hidden self in the context of religious faith. Lewis says that one result of faith “is an increasing awareness that what we once called ‘ourselves’ is only like the skin on the saucepan of boiled milk or the earth-crust on the fiery earth-depths” (*CL III* 629).¹⁰⁶ Since faith cannot operate within the reason alone, Lewis is again hinting at the role of the imagination. Orual, with her awakening imagination, is discovering that the things she claimed as her own—her love for Bardia, her active life as the Queen, and her beliefs about her superiority over Psyche—are all just the fragile surface skim of milk and she has no idea what is really below. When the plant of Bardia-love is pulled, Orual feels as if her “whole soul had been one tooth and now that tooth was drawn” leaving only a gap (*TWHF* 267). Surely now, she thinks, she knows it all—she has devoured the lives of those around her—but she has yet to must face her jealousy of Psyche.

Lewis notes that jealousy is a key part of the dilemma of dividedness that humans experience. Some, like Psyche, will be able to embrace the tension of the seeming opposites, and others, like Orual, will look on and not understand. In the last vision, Orual asks the Fox whether they really did such horrible things to Psyche, and he answers that the pictures are all true. He continues, saying that Psyche

had no more dangerous enemies than us. And in that far distant day when the gods become wholly beautiful, or we at last are shown how beautiful they always were, this will happen more and more. For mortals, as you said, will become more and more jealous. And mother and wife and child and friend will all be in league to keep a soul from being united with the Divine Nature. (*TWHF* 304)

¹⁰⁶ July 7, 1955. Also see Manlove on this topic—he notes that Lewis “deals with the native evasiveness of the soul” in *Till We Have Faces* (*Literary* 203).

Like Orual's love for Bardia, her love for Psyche was actually hatred masquerading as love. She feels that Psyche was "stolen away by . . . this calling of the gods" and thus blames her jealousy on the gods (*TWHF* 291). Lewis describes this in depth in his later book *The Four Loves*. Orual's natural, motherly love for Psyche becomes a demon that destroys Orual's soul when it exceeded its bounds (*FL* 13). Her love actually turned into hatred through her possessiveness and jealousy.¹⁰⁷

Some kind of transformation, then, is required if Orual is to experience the Divine Nature as well. The Fox tells Orual that all are born in the house of Ungit and must get free of her either through death or transformation (*TWHF* 301). Through the series of stories (Tarin about the way she treated Redival and Ansit's story about Bardia), combined with the imaginative experiences through dreams and visions, Orual comes to see herself as Ungit: ugly of body and soul, and devouring of men and women. Her first solution is suicide, but she is stalled by the voice of the god saying, "You cannot escape Ungit by going to the deadlands, for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after" (*TWHF* 279). She submits and turns away from the river, and thus, by her lack of resistance, realizes that she is already changing. Her next attempt at death is in her "passions and desire and vain opinions," a Socrates-style death rather than physical death (*TWHF* 281). She has no success. The "old rage, resentment, gnawing fantasy" and bitterness continue to haunt her, and she concludes that she cannot "mend" her soul anymore than she can beautify her face (*TWHF* 282). Suddenly she has need of the gods, but again, they are distant and of no help. She does not realize how her growing self-knowledge is leading her deeper into an imaginative world capable of interacting with and experiencing Divine Reality. The very fact that she wants the gods to help evidences her change away from the rational, self-contained

¹⁰⁷ See Nancy Enright's article, "C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* and the Transformation of Love" (*Logos* 14:4, Fall 2011), for an analysis of *Till We Have Faces* using Lewis's book *The Four Loves*.

Queen focused on the “god within” towards a selfhood that recognizes the need for sacrifice and death within the united self.

Orual finds that transformation cannot occur in isolation. She cannot change herself and must ultimately accept the sacrifice of another in order to receive beauty of face and soul. Psyche travels to the deadlands to complete the tasks, and the beauty she brings back is for Ungit, for Orual. Psyche achieves the tasks for Orual’s sake, but Orual bore the anguish and suffered for Psyche’s sake. Orual is also Psyche—her mind becomes united (like Psyche’s ability to embrace paradox), and yet she still remains separate from her sister, and at the end, sees in the pool’s reflection “both Psyches, both beautiful . . . yet not exactly the same” (*TWHF* 307-8). Orual has gained a self, a soul, and her rational and imaginative faculties are connected and able to work in consort. When the god arrives, Orual feels like she is being “unmade” and calls herself “no one,” and now places herself on the same plane as Psyche (*TWHF* 307). She no longer claims Psyche for her own, and is able to love freely with a love capable of sacrifice. This is real death—a real emptiness of self that actually elevates rather than destroys the soul. Orual has learned the “true wisdom” by learning the “skill and practice of death” (*TWHF* 281). Lewis is outlining in fiction Charles Williams’s idea about the fundamental vicariousness of the universe, what Williams called “the doctrine of co-inherence” (Gibson 253). Individuals cannot save themselves, but can “help paddle everyone else’s canoe” and bear the anguish for others (*CL III* 200).¹⁰⁸ Orual bears the burden of the tasks for Psyche, not realizing until the end that all her sufferings have actually allowed Psyche to fulfill her wanderings with merriment and singing (*TWHF* 300). This enables Psyche to keep on, and in the end, Psyche is able to restore Orual to wholeness.

Just as the two sisters reach soul transformation through self-sacrifice for each other, so the parts of the mind must work in tandem. The reason must give place for the imagination, not

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Mary Van Deusen, June 10, 1952. See also a letter to Arthur Greeves on July 2, 1949.

lording it over, as Orual does in her disbelief and jealousy of Psyche, but giving the imagination freedom to roam and experience things beyond words. Orual needs to learn that Psyche's experience of the god is valid and real, even though Orual cannot see what Psyche can. The imagination, then, needs to allow the reason to examine the new experiences and data gained from glimpses of reality/Reality, and to give the reason permission to codify this data into words whenever possible. Michael Ward refers to this as Lewis's "three concentric circles" within the human person: the will at the center surrounded by the circle of the reason, which is in turn encompassed by the imagination (*Planet* 225-6). All must work together to achieve the synthesis of belief.

Lewis's symbol of wholeness in *Till We Have Faces* is the face itself. The face mediates between the outer world and the individual's selfhood. Once Orual has separated herself from Psyche, she veils her physical face and hides her soulish face. Both, she learns, are "ruinous," and ugly—they are the earthly faces of Ungit. The Ungit stone presents many faces to the world; some devour, others provide comfort (*TWHF* 270). Orual's Ungit-face devours, she finds no comfort in her conception of the gods, and thus she can give no lasting comfort to others. Before the judge, her veil is stripped away, but the judge himself remains veiled. She now must face the faces of all other men and women in the deadlands: "The old crone with her Ungit face stood naked before those countless gazers" (*TWHF* 289). She cannot see the face of the judge simply because he belongs to some other Reality than her rational mind can witness, and at this point she has no true face yet. The word outburst that follows when she is permitted to read her story strips away her inner soul veil. Finally she hears her "real voice" speaking what has been restlessly lying "at the center" of her soul for years (*TWHF* 292, 294). She has her answer: "I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out

of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?" (*TWHF* 294). Until Orual has a face, the gods cannot answer her; they must remain hidden in riddles until her imaginative faculty is embraced and she can glimpse the real face of Reality. The final answer is to see the face of the god, and this Orual does not experience until after her embracing of the paradoxes of death and sacrifice that hide beyond the scope of her reason. The union between Psyche and Orual, and the healing of the rift between her reason and imagination must occur first. After this, at the end, she is brought before the god himself, and finds that before his "face questions die away" (*TWHF* 308).

Rational-focused Queen Orual lived with a veiled emptiness; her face was closed to all things that have no natural explanation. She could not account for or receive the stories of others. Yet, the stories begin the transformation. Psyche's story contained a Divine Myth that Orual could not receive. The re-wording of that Divine Myth into the sacred story of the priest in Essur allows the true Orual to wake and speak, and permits memory to begin tearing down her carefully worded history. Writing her own story then becomes a continual sifting of soul, a sorting of seeds that clarifies her sight of reality (*TWHF* 256, 253). Tarin's story about Redival's loneliness and rejection from Orual begins her doubts about the past and her ability to record it accurately. Ansit's story opens her up to the probing of the "Divine Surgeons"—when she receives Ansit's story as truth, further awakening occurs and the gods move closer to her through dreams and visions. She accepts the destroyed nature of her face and her devouring Ungit-like soul. All that is "ruinous" and horrible within the depths of her imagination she accepts, and begins the descent from her high-pedestal of clear reason. After hearing her true voice while she reads her book before the judge (the text of which looks like "a vile scribble," like a "snarl" of her father's voice, and like the "ruinous faces" in the Ungit stone), she throws herself off the

pillar of rock into the “black sea of spectres” (*TWHF* 290, 296). She knows now that she has both a rational faculty (that it is limited and filled with mean rants of words) and an imaginative faculty (that is dark as earth and unclear as blood). Both need to be brought together through the mediation of Psyche’s sacrifice and through her own Socrates-like death. The gift of her face signifies the unity of mind and soul. There is no worded answer, because the real answer is beyond the text (and yet strangely fused within the text), hidden in Myth. Orual gains receptivity to story, and thus enters the Mythic Reality that Psyche is already experiencing.

Lewis, in the text of *Till We Have Faces*, transforms the earthly myth of Cupid and Psyche found in Apuleius’s text into his conception of a *Story* that contains an extra-literary Mythic element. He does this by combining the techniques of presentational realism and realism of content to move the story from the vagueness of human mythology into the specificity of the rational-leaning modern novel. In Lewis’s text, the Mythic elements are hidden, forcing the reader to share Orual’s position and question the validity of any imaginative experience of the gods. Lewis is arguing for the power of basic narrative, but qualifying narrative as something deeper than just an “image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe” (qtd. in Scott 145).¹⁰⁹ Life (according to Crites’s theory) and story (according to Lewis’s thought) has a narrative component, but the stories that best approach Reality contain something more. Every plot must have its poetry; every linear narrative must be disrupted. Disruptions can trouble or delight depending upon the approach of the reader. Orual originally viewed stories through the lens of her reason only—she used texts and forced them immediately into Contemplation rather than giving space for a prior reception and Enjoyment. “After all,” Lewis comments in *A Grief Observed*, “you must have a capacity to receive, or even

¹⁰⁹ This is quoted from Alain Robbe-Grillet’s book *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 1965, p 32).

omnipotence can't give" (54). Only those who stand in the sunlight of Enjoyment can see out into the huge, mad world outside the toolshed. Orual learned to "surrender" herself "with childlike attention to the mood of the story" and thus exercised her dormant, sleeping imagination into wakefulness (*SMR* 137). Imagination, for Lewis, is the outer circle, the one that touches the world and reality. If the reason works alone, it can only "use" texts, and this, according to Lewis, is a secondary process, inferior to "reception" (*EIC* 89). The user of literature "merely facilitates, brightens, relieves or palliates" his life, only the "receiver," the one with an alert imagination, is able to "add" to his life (*EIC* 89). In Part I, Orual sought to "do" things, to make the text subservient to her own ideas; in Part II she learns to "rest in" story, allowing it to "mend" her ugly rift of soul and face (*EIC* 89). In respect to literature, "We must," says Lewis, "risk being taken in, if we are to get anything" beyond our own reflections in the mirror (*EIC* 94).¹¹⁰ We must not be like the dwarfs in *The Last Battle* who choose "cunning instead of belief," who wallow in the rational darkness of the stable, in a prison of "their own minds" (*TLB* 140). They are "so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out" of their prison—they cannot enter the Reality beyond the narrow confines of their minds (*TLB* 140). That Reality, according to Lewis, is only entered through the door of the imagination, at least while we are residing in the *Story* itself. He suggests through the Fox in *Till We Have Faces*, "nothing is yet in its true form" (*TWHF* 305); we must learn to live with the tension between reason and imagination, and thereby gain a face. Only then can the imagination move within and beyond words, able to see the "true form," the Myth, hidden in the text.

¹¹⁰ Hart lists risk-taking as a theme of *Till We Have Faces*; Orual wants the security of power and answers, and demands these from the gods. Hart argues that Lewis emphasizes the "illusion" of any such securities, and displays Psyche as the risk-taker (*Through* 142).

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